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MATERFAMILIAS

BY

ADA CAMBRIDGE

AUTHOR OF
THE THREE MISS KINGS, A MARRIAGE CEREMONY,
MY GUARDIAN, NOT ALL IN VAIN, FIDELIS,
A LITTLE MINX, ETC.

NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1898

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MATERFAMILIAS.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF IT ALL.

My father in England married a second time when I was about eighteen. She was my governess.

Mother herself had engaged her, and I believe had asked, when dying, that she would remain to take care of us; and I don't say that she was not a good woman. She had been nearly five years in the house, and we had the habit of looking to her for advice in all family concerns; and certainly she took great pains with my education. But of course I was not going to stand seeing her put in mother's place. I told father so. I

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said to him, kindly, but firmly: "Father, you will have to choose between us. There will not be room under this roof for both."

He chose her. Consequently I left my home, though they both tried hard to prevent it, and to reconcile me to their new arrangements. I will say that for them. In fact, my father, pleading legal rights, forbade me to go, except for some temporary visiting. I went on the understanding that I was to return in a couple of months or so. But I was resolved not to return, and I never did. While staying with my uncle, a medical man, I privately married his assistant—one (if I may say so) of a miscellaneous assortment of admirers. I am afraid I encouraged him to propose an elopement; I certainly hastened its accomplishment. Then after all our plottings and stratagems, when at last I had the ring on my finger, I wrote to inform father of what he and Miss Coleman had driven me to. Poor old father! It was a tremendous blow to him. But I don't know why he should have made such a fuss about it, seeing that

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he had done the same—practically the same—himself.

It was a greater disaster to me than to him, or to anybody—even to my husband, who almost from the first regarded me as a millstone about his neck; for *he* could go away and enjoy himself when he liked, forgetting that I existed. Indeed, it was a horrible catastrophe. When my own children are so anxious to get married while they are still but children, and think it so cruel of me to thwart them, I wish I could tell them what I went through at their age! But I don't mention it. I promised Tom I never would.

At twenty I was teaching for a living—I, who had been so petted and coddled, hardly allowed to do a hand's turn for myself! My husband was travelling about the world as a ship's doctor. Father wanted me to come home, but I was too proud for that. Besides, I would not go where I had to hear Edward insulted. After all, he was my husband, and our matrimonial troubles were entirely our own concern. Not from him,

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either, would I accept anything after I was able to earn for myself. I taught at a school for thirty pounds a year, and managed to make that do. It was a wretched life.

I was barely of age when the news came that Edward had caught fever somewhere and been left in a Melbourne hospital by his ship, which was returning without him. At once I made up my mind that it was my duty as a wife to go to him. He had no friends in Australia, and not much money; it was pathetic to think of him alone and helpless amongst utter strangers; and I thought that if I did this for him he would remember it afterwards, and be kind to me, and help me to make our married life a little more like other people's. In those days there was no cable across the world, and mails but once a month; so that when I started I was altogether in the dark as to what I was going to. The first news of his illness—with no particulars, except that it was fever—was all I ever had.

I would not ask my father for money.

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Indeed, he would have frustrated my purpose altogether had he known of it in time. I went to my old godmother, Aunt Kate, who was very rich and fond of me, and begged the loan of fifty pounds, not telling her what I wanted it for. She gave the money outright, with another fifty added to it; so that I had plenty to cover the cost of a comfortable voyage. I determined, however, to save on the voyage all I could, that I might have something in my pocket on landing, when funds would be sorely needed. To which end I engaged my berth in the humblest passenger-boat available—Tom's little Racer, of ever-beloved memory. They told me at the office that she was better than her name—faster than many that were twice her size. I was young and silly enough to believe them, and also to forget that by the time I reached Australia Edward's illness would have long been a thing of the past, and he perhaps back in England or well on his way thither.

If the Racer was one of the smallest ships in the Australian trade, her master, Thomas

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Braye, must have been one of the youngest captains. At that time he was under thirty, though he did not look it, being a big man, quiet and grave in manner, deeply sensible of his professional responsibilities. I remember thinking him rather rough and decidedly plain when I saw him first; but he was gentleness and gentlemanliness incarnate, and I never afterwards thought of his appearance except to note the physical inadequacy of other men beside him.

He has told me since that *his* first feeling on seeing *me* was one of strong annoyance. Though a married woman and going out to my husband, I was but a young girl in fact—far too young and far too pretty (though I say it) to be travelling as I was, without an escort. It unfortunately happened that I was the only lady in the saloon, and that the ship was too small to have a stewardess. Three wives of artisans herded with their husbands and children in the black hole they called the steerage, and one of them was summoned aft as soon as we were in the river to keep me

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company. But as the others were disagreeable about it, and she was a coarse and dirty creature, I myself begged Captain Braye to send her back again. Poor Tom! By the way, I did not call him Tom then, of course; I did not even know his Christian name. He says he never undertook a job so unwillingly as he did that job of taking care of me. How absurd it seems—now!

We sailed in late autumn, in the twilight of the afternoon. I remember the look of the Thames as we were towed down—the low, cold sky, the slate-coloured mist, with mere shadows of shores and ships just looming through it. Nothing could have been more dreary. And yet I enjoyed it. The feeling that I was free of that horrible schoolroom, and that still more horrible lodging-house, where I cooked meals over an etna on a painted washstand, and ate them as I sat on a straw-stuffed bed—the prospect of long rest from the squalid scramble that life had become, from all-day work that had tired me to death—oh, no one can understand what lux-

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ury that was! Besides, I had hopes of the future, based on Edward's convalescence and reform, to buoy me up. And then I loved the sea. People are born to love it, or not to love it; it is a thing innate, like genius, never to be acquired, and never to be lost, under any circumstances. When the Channel opened out, and the long swell began to lift and roll, I knew that I was in my native element, though a dweller inland from birth up to this moment. The feel of the buoyant deck and of the pure salt wind was like wings to soul and body.

But I had to pay my footing first. It came upon me suddenly, in the midst of my raptures, and I staggered below, and cast myself, dressed as I was, upon my bunk. Never, never had I felt so utterly forsaken! When ill before, with my little, trivial complaints, Miss Coleman had waited on me hand and foot—everybody had coddled me; now I was overwhelmed in unspeakable agonies, and nobody cared. It is true that—though I would not have her—the steerage woman

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came in the middle of the night; and once I roused from a merciful snatch of sleep to find my bracket lamp alight where all had been darkness. These things indicated that some one was concerned about me—Tom, of course—but I did not realize it then. I was alone in my misery, alone in the wide world, of no consequence even to my own husband; and I wished I was dead.

Early in the morning—it was a rough morning, and we were in a heavy, wintry sea—the captain tapped at my door. I was too deadly ill even to answer him; so he turned the handle and looked in. Seeing that I was dressed, he advanced with a firm step, and, standing over me, said, in the same voice with which he ordered the sailors to do things—

"Mrs. Filmer, you must come up on deck."

I merely shook my head. I was powerless to lift a finger.

"Oh, yes, you must. You will feel ever so much better in the air."

"I can't," I wailed, and closed my eyes.

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I believe the tears were running down my face.

He stood for a minute in silence. I felt him looking at me. Then he said, with a kindness in his voice that made me shake with sobs—

"I'll go and rig up a chair or something for you. Be ready for me when I come back in ten minutes. If you can't walk, we will carry you."

He departed, and the steerage woman arrived, very sulky. I was obliged to accept her help this time. Captain Braye, I felt, did not mean to be defied, and it was a physical impossibility for me to make a toilet for myself. When he returned he brought the steward with him, and, before I knew it, he had whisked a big rug round and round me, and taken me up in his arms. I weighed about seven stone, and he is the strongest man I know. The steward carried my feet, but it was a mere pretense of carrying; he was only there as a sort of chaperon, because Tom was so absurdly particular. Up on the

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poop, with the ship violently rolling and pitching, the man could not keep his own feet, and let mine go, and we did not miss him. Tom bore me safely and easily, like a Blondin with his pole, to where he had fixed a folding-chair for me—it was his own chair, for I had not been able to afford one—and there he set me down, in the midst of pillows and an opossum rug, with that sort of powerful gentleness which is the manliest thing I know. All at once he made me feel that I was in shelter and at rest. As long as I remained on that ship I could cease fighting with the difficulties of my lot. He would take care of me. There are women who don't want men to take care of them—I am not one of those; I have no vocation for independence.

I found I could not sit in that chair, luxurious as it was. I think all my worries and hard work and bad meals must have undermined me. Even though Tom made me drink brandy and water, I could not hold myself up.

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"Oh," I sighed wretchedly, "I feel so faint and swimmy, I *must* lie down!"

"So you shall," he answered, like a kind father, and he shouted to the steward to bring up a mattress and pillows. In five minutes there was a bed on the deck floor, and I was in it, swathed in fur and blankets, like a chrysalis in its cocoon, more absolutely comfortable than I had ever been in my life. I still felt ill and exhausted, and could not bear the thought of food; but I breathed the sweet, cold, reviving air, and yet was as warm as a toast, and no spray or rain could touch me. When he had tucked me up to his satisfaction, placing his oilskins over all, he took some rope and lashed me to the bars of the hen-coops behind me. And there I lay all day, resting and dozing. No matter how the ship rolled, it could not roll me out of my nest; being so secure, I felt the motion to be soothing rather than the reverse. When not asleep, I gazed at the pure sky and the gleaming tiers of sails, listened to the voices of the wind and of the sea, and watched the

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stalwart figure of my dear commander. At short intervals he would come over to ask if I was all right; and at least once an hour he brought something with him—brandy and water or strong broth—and fed me with it out of a spoon. Oh, Tom! Tom! And I had almost forgotten what it was like to be tended and cared for in that way.

In a day or two I was well enough to walk about the ship and occupy myself, and he was more reserved with me again. But still I always knew that he was keeping guard over my comings and goings, and I felt as safe as possible. His officers and my fellow saloon-passengers—none of them gentlemen like him—were too much interested in my movements after I began to move, and his eye seemed always upon them. Now and then I was embarrassed and annoyed, and at such moments he quietly stepped in to relieve me, never making a fuss, but promptly putting people back into their proper places. At the first hint of trouble of this sort he had a spare cabin turned into a little sitting-room

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for me—my boudoir, he called it—where I might always retire when I wanted privacy. I found it a comfort at times, but still my sleeping-berth would have done almost as well; for I never wanted any visitor but him, and he never asked to come. When it was weather for it, I lived on the poop in his folding-chair—always lashed ready for me—and that's where I preferred to be. Even when not weather for it, I often begged to stay, for the support of his company; and sometimes, but not always, he would allow me to do so, making me fast with ropes, and surrounding me with a screen of tarpaulin. For hours I would lie, like a cradled baby, and watch his gallant figure and his alert eyes, and listen to his steady tramp, as he went up and down. I had no fear of anything while he was there, and he seemed always there. I learned afterwards how terribly he deprived himself of rest and sleep because of his responsibility for the safety of us all.

For the Racer was an ancient vessel of the tramp description, little fitted to do battle

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with such storms as we encountered. Her old timbers creaked and groaned, as if in their last agony, when buffeted by the heavy seas; and the way she took in water at the pores, without actually springing leaks, was dreadful. The clacking of the pumps and the gushing of the inexhaustible stream seemed always in one's ears, and when waves broke over her and drained down through a stove-in skylight, of course it was far worse—even dangerous. She simply wallowed about like a log, too heavy and lumbering to get out of the way of anything. I could not bear to see Tom's stern and haggard face, to know the strain he was enduring, and that I could do nothing to lighten it; but as for *danger*—I never thought of such a thing! Not that I am at all a courageous person, as a rule.

I believe we were somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Cape when the most noteworthy of our experiences befell us. We were struggling with the chronic "dirty" weather—absurd adjective for a thing so majestic and inspiring!—and I was on deck,

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firmly tied to my chair, and my chair to the mast, dry under oilskins, and only my face exposed to wind and spray, which threatened to take the skin off. I could hardly see the length of the ship through the spindrift of the gale, and the way it shrieked in the rigging was like fiends let loose. Bee—a—utiful!

And Tom wanted to spoil all my pleasure by shutting me down in a nasty, stuffy, smelly, pitch-dark cabin, where I couldn't breathe and shouldn't know anything that went on, nor have a soul to speak to. However, I was getting used to him by this time, and so, when he staggered up and announced that he had come to take me below, because it was no longer fit for me to be on deck, I told him flatly that I would not go.

"You must go," said he.

"I won't go," said I.

"The captain's commands must be obeyed, Mrs. Filmer."

"Not in this case, Captain."

"In every case, Madam."

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"Not a bit of it," I persisted, laughing in his face, which was rather grim, but yet not quite inflexible. "I am not one of your sailors, to be ordered about. I shall do what I like. And this is exactly what I like."

He condescended to argue, and then of course I would not give in. He said he must use force and carry me, but that was an obviously impossible thing to do without my assistance, considering the angle of the decks. When I saw him looking really worried, I condescended to plead myself, and I suppose he could not resist that. He has told me since that he never felt the same man after this act of weakness, but I'm sure I cannot see where the weakness came in. With great difficulty, and meanwhile flashing anxious glances hither and thither, he got more rope and made fresh windings and tyings about me.

"You are a spoilt child," was all he said. He did not look happy, but I was very pleased with the issue of our encounter. I felt that it had strengthened my position somehow—taken away all my awe and fear

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of him—and I would not have missed my subsequent experiences on deck that day for anything.

They were really tremendous. No sooner had I been trussed up like an Indian baby in preparation for contingencies—no sooner had Tom left me to give his undivided attention to the ship—than the chronic gale produced a spasmodic and special one which I am sure was a cyclone of the first magnitude, though he would not give it that name in the book. What he called nor'-nor'-east had been the direction of the storm we had grown used to, but just before he asked me to go below it had shifted to "nor'," and now it jumped all at once to "sou'-west," with effects upon the sea and the poor ship that were truly startling. Those wall-sided mountains of water, that were bad enough to get over when we knew which way they were going, began a furious dance together, all jumbled up anyhow; and the first treacherous monster created by the change of wind crashed bodily inboard quite close to where I sat—"pooped"

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us, as Tom expressed it—and, washing over me, simply swept all before it, including the wheel and the two poor men steering, who were driven upon rail and rigging with such force as to injure both of them. How my lashings held as they did I cannot understand —or, rather, I can, of course—when strong wood was being torn from iron fastenings; and how I issued alive from that tremendous shower-bath is much more wonderful. It must have been the packing round me that saved my bones from being smashed like the boats and hen-coops. I heard Tom's shout of warning just before I was overwhelmed, and when I emerged, and could expand my breathless lungs, I answered him, with a strange and joyful lifting of the heart, "All right! I'm safe! Don't mind me, Captain!"

If he had minded me at that moment we should have been lost together, ship and all. She began to broach to, as they call it, and the supplementary wheel had to be used at once to stop it, and just then our lives hung upon a hair. The decks were filled to the

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brim, and I could hear the deluge thudding down through the shattered skylight upon the table set for dinner. And she rolled all but bottom upwards, the broken rail going under and I dangling in air above it, and—and, in short, if any one but Tom had been her captain she would never have been heard of from that day. I am quite convinced of that. No man born could have accomplished what he did—he says, "Nonsense," but I know what I am talking about—although I was just as sure that *he* would accomplish it as I was that the sun would rise next morning. I calmly held on to my supports, and waited and watched. Sometimes I clenched my teeth and shut my eyes, while I prayed for his preservation in the perils he did not seem to see. He called to me at short intervals, "Are you all right?" and I called back, "All right!" And when the worst was over for the moment, he scrambled to where I was, and fixed me up afresh. Never shall I forget the look on his face and the ring in his voice when he spoke to me. "Brave girl!

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Brave girl!" I think it was the happiest moment of my life.

"But I don't understand it," he said to me, later, when there was time to breathe and talk. "Why are you not frightened? When you were first on board, crying because you were seasick——"

"I did *not* cry because I was seasick," I indignantly interposed, "but because I was lonely and miserable. You would have cried if you had been in my place."

"I thought," he continued, heedless of the interruption, "that you were a poor little baby creature, without an ounce of pluck in you. But you've got the courage of a grenadier. How is it?"

"It is because I am with you," I answered promptly.

I don't know what feeling I allowed to get into my voice, but something struck him. Motionless where he stood, he stared at the great waves silently, for what seemed a long time; then abruptly walked forward to give an order, and did not come back.

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We were mostly silent when we were together after that. How hard I tried to think of a common topic to discuss, and could not! So did he. But while I had nothing to do but to think, he was terribly preoccupied with the condition of the ship. She had recovered to a certain extent, and was able to stagger on again, but she was a living wreck, all splintered and patched, and the difficulty of keeping the water down was greater than before. The pumps were always clanking, and the carpenter hammering, and the sailmaker putting canvas plasters over weak places. The whole ship's company were glum and weary, and the passengers—wet, ill-fed, and wretched—complained loudly all the time, indifferent as to how much they added to the poor captain's cares. He, though firm with everybody, never lost his temper, or seemed to give way to the depression that must at times have weighed him down. He was worthy to command who could so command himself—worthy to be a sailor, which is the noblest calling in the world. As for me—

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well, it was no credit to me that I, of all on board, was satisfied to be there, and consequently happy. I kept a serene and smiling face to cheer him. It was the least that I could do.

And it did cheer him. To my unspeakable comfort I was assured of that, though he did not say so. I could see it in his face, and hear it in his voice, when now and then he came to sit beside me, evidently for rest and peace.

"And so," he said, on one of these occasions, speaking in an absent-minded way—"and so you are not nervous with me? Well, I hope I shall be able to justify your trust."

"You will," I said calmly. "You could not help it."

"Heaven knows!" he ejaculated. "The glass is falling again, fast."

"Never mind the glass. It is always falling."

"I wouldn't, if I had any sort of proper ship under me. But this—— she isn't fit for women to sail in."

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"If she is good enough for you," I remarked cheerfully, "she is good enough for me."

"But she isn't. I don't ask for much—at my age—but I do want a ship of some sort, not a sieve. Oh, dear! oh, dear!"—looking round him with a restless sigh—"we shall be months getting to Melbourne at this rate."

"I don't care," I said, "if we are years."

He made no comment on this statement, which I blushed to perceive was a mistake; and I hastened to remind him that Edward's illness must have been over long ago. Then he began, in an abrupt manner, to ask me how I thought the passengers were bearing the trial of short rations which he had been compelled to lay upon them.

One day we were at great peace, because the weather was beautiful and the water in the well diminished. A hammock of sail-cloth had been made for me, and slung in a nice place, and I lay there almost the whole day through, swinging softly with the ship as she soared and dived over mile-long bil-

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lows or swayed in the deep beam swells with the airy motion of a bird upon the wing. The Racer could feel like that at times, even yet; and I was too happy for speech or thought—that is, in a sad and pensive fashion. So, I know, was Tom, although he too had no words and hardly a look for me as he paced to and fro. It was just the consciousness that I was there—that he was there—permitted to rest together for an interval from our battle with fate. Even the sight of his substantial figure, never out of my mind's eye, while my other eyes saw only the lifting and sinking of the gunwale against the gleaming, silky sea—even the roar of his strong voice, occasionally using "language" in a professional way—could not take away the sense as of an enchanted world enveloping us, as if we were disembodied spirits in some heavenly sphere. But I can't describe it. Perhaps the reader understands.

The night was lovelier than the day—there was a moon shining—and one literally *ached* with the sweetness of it. Each of us

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was on the way to bed, and somehow we could not resist the temptation to linger by the rail a little. The ship was under command of the chief officer, and all was well for the time. We were alone where we stood.

Speaking of the change of weather and his late responsibilities, he said: "If I am ever so unfortunate as to lose the lives committed to me, I shall just stand still and go down with the ship—when I have done what I can do."

"If that should come," I returned, "please don't put me into a boat and send me off without you. Let me stand still and go down too."

"Not if there's a chance for the boat," he said.

We had spoken in a light way, but deep thoughts welled up in us. "Oh," I broke out—for I had not his self-control—"oh, it would be better than anything that could happen to me now!"

All he said to that was "Hush—sh—sh!" but I could not check myself immediately.

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"I would rather die that way than live—as I must live when I no longer have you to take care of me!" I wailed, reckless. "Oh, I wish I could! I wish I could!"

And indeed I meant it. Even as we went down, I thought, he would keep the sea monsters from terrifying and devouring me; he would take care of me, regardless of himself—that was inevitable—until we were both dead. The fear of death was nothing to the fear of life as it would present itself at my journey's end. I had *no* fear of death—with him.

He laid his broad, brown hand on mine that clutched the rail—a solemn gesture—and he said, in a shaking voice, "My dear, it's well you remind me that it's my business to take care of you. We have got our duty to do, both of us. Come, it's getting late; it's bed time. We mustn't stay here in the moonlight and let ourselves get foolish."

Still holding my hand, he led me downstairs. At the door of my cabin he gave it a great strong squeeze, and then let it go with-

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out another word. He did not kiss me. Oh, true heart! Death to him would have been infinitely easier than the ordeal I made him suffer through those long weeks. But he never allowed himself to be overcome.

It was not long after this that the dreaded moment came when land was reported. Words cannot describe my terror of the impending change. It was my only safe haven —my home—from which I was, as I thought, to be cast out, and I simply dared not imagine what sort of life awaited me.

The crippled Racer anchored in Hobson's Bay at nightfall. Most of the passengers went off in boats, and those who rowed to the ship returned with them. Dressed in walking clothes, I sat in the little cabin that had been my sitting-room, listening and shivering, trying (with the example I had before me) to brace myself to meet things as a brave woman should; but no one came for me. Only Tom. Rather late in the evening, when all had gone except the steerage woman and her children, with whose husband and father

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he had made some business arrangement, the captain entered my private apartment alone for the first time. There was an indescribable expression on his face, which had looked so fagged of late. His eyes did not meet mine. His whole frame trembled like a girl's.

"Oh, has he come?" I cried—I believe I almost shrieked.

"No," said he; "he hasn't come. You'd better go to bed now—go and sleep if you can—and I'll tell you about it to-morrow."

"What is it?" I implored. "What has happened? What have you heard? Oh, tell me now, for pity's sake!"

He sat down on the little bunk beside me, and took my hand between his two hands; he did it as a father might do it, to support my weakness under the shock coming.

"The fact is, Mrs. Filmer—the fact is, dear—I sent ashore for news. I thought I'd better make some inquiries first. And—and—and——"

"I know—I know! He has left the country, and abandoned me again!"

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"No, poor fellow! He died of that illness—six months ago."

At first I did not understand the meaning of the words. It was an event that had never entered into my calculations, strange to say. But the moment I realised the position—it is a dreadful, dreadful thing to confess, but God knows I never meant any harm—my arms instinctively went up to Tom's stooping shoulders and, hiding my face in his breast, I nearly swooned with joy.

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CHAPTER II.

IN THE EARLY DAYS.

I was not a girl, but a woman, when I married Tom. He, a man incapable of grossness in any shape or form, was still a man, healthily natural, of ripe experience in the ways of men. Whatever our faults in the past—if they were faults—the result was to teach us what we could never otherwise have learned, the meaning of wedlock in its last perfection. Don't let any one run down second marriages to me! The way to them must necessarily be painful and troubled, and one always desires passionately to keep one's children out of it; but the end of the journey, bringing together, open-eyed to all the conditions, educated to discriminate and understand, two born mates like Tom and me—ah, well! One mustn't say all one

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thinks about these matters—except, of course, to him.

Talking of being open-eyed, I was so blind at one time as actually to fancy that he was in no hurry to have me. When I gave him to understand—hardly knowing what I did—that I should die or something without him to take care of me, he said he asked nothing better than to take care of me, God knew, but that how to do it for the best was what bothered him. It did not bother me in the slightest degree. I depended on him—only on him of all the world—and I told him so; and yet he wanted, after *that*, to send me back to my father with some old woman whom I had never seen, in another ship, while he took the Racer home—which never would have got home, nor he either. And I a married woman, independent in my own right, and over twenty-one! However, I flatly refused to go, except with him, as I had come. He said he would not trust my life to that rotten tub again, and I said—I forget what I said, but I hurt his feelings by it; and then

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I cried bitterly, and said I would go out and be a housemaid.

The deadlock was suddenly ended by the Racer being condemned by the authorities of the port as unfit for sea again. When that happened we both decided to stay in the new country, and, having him near me, I was quite content to postpone matrimony until things became a little settled. It was soon plain enough that he was not anxious to postpone for the mere sake of doing so; he only wanted a clear understanding with father first, as well as with his owners, and to give me time for second thoughts, and for considering the advice of my family.

It took long for letters to come and go, and I began to be haunted in my walks by a strange man, who—I suppose—admired me. Tom found this out on the same day that he accepted an appointment as chief officer with a Melbourne shipping company. I could not imagine what had happened when he came to see me at my poor lodging with such a resolute face.

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"Mary," he said, "who's that fellow hanging round outside? I've seen him several times."

"Tom," I protested sincerely, "I don't know any more than you do. But he is a rude man; he stares at me and follows me, and I can't get rid of him. Of course, he sees that I am——" I was going to say "unprotected," and hastily substituted "alone," which was not much better.

"Well, now, look here—I've got a ship, Mary"—he did not pain me with further explanations on that head; later I wept to think of his subservient position in that ship—"and this means an income, dear. Not much, but perhaps enough——"

"Does it mean that you are going away?" I cried, terrified.

"Not far. Only for a few days at a time. I start on Friday. This is Monday."

He took my hands; he looked into my eyes; I knew him so well that I knew just what he was going to say. The colour poured

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into my face, but I made no mock-modest pretence of being shy or shocked.

As a preliminary, he questioned me as if I were on trial for my life. "Answer me *quite* truthfully, Mary"—he called me Mary before we were married, but always Polly afterwards—"tell me, on your solemn word of honour, do you love me—beyond all possible doubt—beyond all chance of changing or tiring, after it's too late?"

I told him that I loved him beyond doubt, beyond words, beyond everything, and should do so, I was absolutely convinced, to my life's end. I further declared that he knew it as well as I did, and was simply wasting breath.

"And you really and truly do wish to marry me, Mary?"

I attempted to laugh at his tragic gravity and his awkward choice of words. I said I didn't unless he did, that I wouldn't inconvenience him or force his inclination for the world. I asked him, plainly, whether he thought that quite the way to put it.

"Yes," he said. "For I want to make

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sure that I—that circumstances—are not taking advantage of you while you are young and helpless. And yet how can I be sure?"

He took my face between his hands and gazed at it, as if he would look down through my eyes to the bottom of my soul. I shut them after a moment, and tears began to ooze between the lids at the thought that he could doubt me. One trickled out and splashed upon his knee, and my heart began to heave with the impulse to cry in earnest. Then he drew my face—drew me into his arms, and we sat a little without speaking, hearing our hearts thump.

"We'll chance it, shall we?" he whispered between short breaths. "Sooner or later it must come to that, and better as soon as possible if I have to leave you in Melbourne alone. You won't be so much alone if you belong to me, even when I am away—will you, sweetheart?"

I merely sighed—that kind of long, full, vibrating sigh which means that your feelings are too deep for words.

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"I think I shall be able to answer to your father—I hope so," he continued, rallying his constant self-control. "I think I am justified, Mary. If not——"

But I would not let him go upon that tack. Justification was absolute, in my view of the case. I know what the ill-natured reader will say—she will say that I threw myself at his head, that I forced myself upon him, that I did not give him a chance to get out of marrying me if he had wanted to; but that is only because she knows nothing whatever about it. I cannot explain. I simply state the fact that we had one mind between us on the matter, and if she doesn't believe me I can't help it.

"This is Monday," Tom repeated, "and I sail on Friday. If we are going to do it, Mary, I'd like it done before I leave. There's nothing to wait for, if we don't wait for the letters, is there?"

I told him nothing—that I was in his hands; and he proposed that we should walk out then and there to find some one to "splice"

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us, as he appropriately termed it, because it would be so much easier to attend to all the other business after we were man and wife than before.

Sailors have a terse way of acting as well as of speaking, and the change that made life such a different thing for both of us actually took place that very day as ever was. When the unknown admirer would have followed young Mrs. Filmer in her evening walk—it was too hot to go out earlier—there was no such person. Mrs. Braye was dining delicately at a pleasant seaside hostelry, in the company of her lawful protector, whose name alone was like a charm to keep his proud wife in safety.

We gave ourselves until Wednesday morning. Then we worked all Wednesday and Thursday, like two navvies, to settle ourselves in the small lodging that we selected for our first home. We were as poor as poor could be and had to proceed accordingly, but little I cared for that, or for anything now that I had him. On Friday afternoon he

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sailed—a subordinate on that trumpery intercolonial boat, after being captain and lord of an English ship—and I cried all night, and counted the hours all day till he returned, when I went quite daft with joy. Not that much joy was allowed us, even now, seeing that the greater part of his short sojourn in port had to be spent on board. But it was wonderful what value we could cram into the precious minutes when we did get them. Again we had the agony of parting, the weary interval of separation, the renewed bliss of the return, continually intensified; and then the letters came—the letters we had tried, so unsuccessfully, to wait for. Father desired me to come home for a time—a foregone conclusion—and Miss Coleman did the same in more impassioned sentences. I daresay it was heartless, but I laughed and danced with delight to know that it was all too late for advice of that sort. And, to counteract any possible feeling of remorse, Aunt Kate wrote in the sweetest way, all fun and jokes, practically approving and encouraging me in the

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course I had taken. To a young woman so situated, she said, fathers were quite useless and superfluous, and she advised me to please myself, as I had always done—that was how she put it. Best of all, she sent me a draft for £500, either to come home with or for a wedding present, as the case might be. And this precious windfall enabled us to take a little private house that we could make a proper home of.

. . . . . .

The worst of being on these small lines is the uncertainty about the movements of your ship. In winter Tom would run one trip for months, or suddenly stop in the middle for docking and repairs—a mere excuse for laying up, I used to say, because trade was not paying expenses—in which case he would have a holiday without salary, and the pleasure of his companionship would be marred by anxieties about money. In summer there were occasional special excursions, "round tours," that kept him away for a month or

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six weeks at a time; and these were what I dreaded most.

We had not yet had this long separation, but I knew—knew, but would not admit—there was danger of it when we had been married a little less than a year. It was our second Australian summer, and the time of all times when I could not endure to part from him. I had now grown accustomed to having him at home for a day and a couple of nights weekly—happily he had a command again, such as it was, and could do as he liked in port—and that was far, far too little, under the circumstances.

He was sleeping late, and I, having prepared his breakfast, sat down by an open window to read the morning paper until he should appear. As a matter of course, I *always* saw the name of our ship before I saw anything else, even the Births, Marriages, and Deaths; she had her place in a list of the company's vessels, with her sailing dates, in smallish print, answering to her comparatively modest rank in life; my eye fell on the

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exact spot by instinct in the moment of the page becoming visible. I suppose it was the same instinct which to-day drew my first glance to quite another column, where s.s. Bendigo stood in larger type. My heart jumped and seemed to stop—"Christmas Holiday Excursion to West Coast of New Zealand, if sufficient inducement offers." There it was! And I felt I had all along expected it.

I got up to run to Tom with the news. On second thoughts I decided to let him have his sleep out before dealing him a blow that would spoil his rest for many a night to come, and tramped round and round the breakfast-table, moaning and wringing my hands, asking cruel Fate why Christmas should be chosen—*this* Christmas of all times—and how I was to get through without my husband to take care of me.

My husband looked most concerned when he saw what I was doing. "Hullo, Polly, what's up?" was his greeting, as he faced me from the doorway; and his bright home-look vanished like a lamp blown out.

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I could not speak for the rush of tears. I held out the newspaper, pointing to the fatal spot, and, when he took it, abandoned myself upon his shoulder.

"Oh, Tom — Christmas! *Christmas*, Tom!"

He read in silence, with an arm round my waist. For a whole minute and more we heard the clock ticking. Then he cleared his throat, and said soothingly: "After all, it mayn't come to anything—at any rate, not till afterwards. People don't care to be away from their homes at Christmas. It's only an approximate date."

He was wrong. The postponements that invariably take place at other times did not occur this time—as if on purpose. The hot weather set in early, and it seemed that many people did desire to escape, not from it only, but from the social responsibilities of the so-called festive season. The Bendigo was a good boat, as everybody knew, and her captain a great favourite with the travelling public. I don't wonder at it! So that the pas-

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senger list filled rapidly, and every day brought us less hope of a reprieve. Tom seemed a year older each time that he returned from the regular voyage, bringing this information, and I know I nearly drove him mad with my pale face and tear-sodden eyes. One day he told me so.

"*What* am I to do?" he groaned, staring strangely. "How can I leave you like this? I can't, I can't! and yet, if I don't go, Polly —it is all our living, my dear——"

Nothing ever frightened me so much. For *him* to have that look of agitation—my strong rock of protection and defence—he who had never wondered what he was to do, but always knew and did it, while others wondered—it was too shocking. I pulled myself together immediately.

"After all," I said, with a gulp and a smile, "the other poor seamen's wives have to take their chance of this sort of thing, so why not I?"

"You," he replied, in his fond, stupid way, "are not like the others, my pretty one."

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He meant that I was far more choice and precious.

"Being pretty," I rejoined, "is no disadvantage that I know of, having regard to the present circumstances. Now if I was delicate, then you *might* be anxious. Tommy, dear, I can't have you look like that! And there's no reason in the world why I should not do as well as possible—as well as everybody else does; indeed, I'm sure I shall. Of course I shall miss you awfully—awfully"—my cheerful voice quavered in spite of myself—"but there will be the proper people to look after me, and—and—*think* what it will be when you come back again!"

He had me in his arms now, with my face under his left ear.

"My brave girl!" he murmured. "My own brave girl!"

Just as when he called me that before, my heart rose elated. I determined to deserve the title.

"Of course you must go," I said firmly; "it is our living, as you say. No use having

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a family, and nothing to keep it on, is it? I suppose it won't be *more* than a month? A month is soon over. I can send you telegrams. Don't you worry about me. I'm a wicked idiot to fret and grumble; it is because you have spoiled me, love! I have got so used to having you to take care of me——"

I choked, and burst into fresh tears.

However, I did manage to keep up very well until he went. Of course he *had* to go; we agreed about that. Not much of Aunt Kate's wedding present was left by this time. We had our little home, all comfortable and paid for, but his small salary comprised the whole of our current income. It would never have done to jeopardise that.

But oh, it was cruel! It *was* cruel! He says I shall never understand the agony of his soul when he bade me good-bye, and I tell him he can't possibly have suffered the thousandth part of what I suffered. We clasped and kissed as if we never expected to see each other again. I really don't think we did ex-

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pect it. And yet I was quite well and strong, and every possible thing had been done to safeguard me in his absence. Poor as we were, he made the nurse, who charged three guineas a week, come into the house before he left it, and engage to stay there till his return; and he also installed a nice old lady, whose son he had befriended, and who he thought would be a mother to me when the time of trial came. So she was; but not even an own mother could have made up for the want of him.

"God keep you safe for me," he prayed, as he held me to him, heart to heart. "And you'll take care of yourself, my Polly. You won't fret, and make yourself sick and weak —promise that you won't—for my sake!"

"I won't," I answered him, trying to comfort him; "I will be as good as possible. We'll *both* be well and strong—well and happy—to meet you when you come home again. Tom! Tom! *do* you realise what the next home-coming will be? Let us look forward to that."

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So I kept up to the last, to hearten him. The very last was the seeing the ship go by at nightfall, on her way to sea. I lived where I lived on purpose to have this view of her as she passed in and out. I watched for her for an hour, and when she came it was too dark for me to see my darling on the bridge through the strong glasses he had given me on purpose that I might see him, and the flutter of his cabin towel against the black funnel. Nor could he see me in the blue dusk of the shore, with the evening afterglow behind it. But he sent a farewell toot across the water, and I pulled the blind to the top of my window, and lit up my room with every lamp and candle I could find. I knew he was looking, and that he knew I knew it. We always signalled good-night in this way when he passed out late.

So I kept up to the very last. But when I saw his mast-head light go round the pier, like a bright star in the evening sky, and glide towards the sea that was to keep him from me so long when I wanted him so des-

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perately, then I collapsed like a spent bubble, and all my courage went out of me. I think I fainted there by the window, all of a heap upon the floor.

At any rate, his back was hardly turned —he could scarcely have cleared the Heads, we reckoned—when the catastrophe befell. I have often tried to imagine what his feelings were when, at his first port of call, the intelligence was conveyed to him that he had a son, and that mother and child were doing well. He attempted to express them by letter, but he is not literary. And he can't gush. All the same, I know—I know!

Did I say that the happiest moment of my life was when he called me a brave girl? I was wrong. The happiest moment of my life —even though Tom was away from me—was the moment when I heard the first cry of my own child. Words cannot describe the effect on me of that little voice so suddenly audible, as great an astonishment as if one had never expected it; but every mother in the world will understand.

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Oh, I am getting maudlin with these reminiscences! I can't help it.

He was a beautiful boy—my Harry—worthy to be his father's son. We called him Harry because Henry was Tom's second name, and also that of my own father, whom I wished to please; for, after all, he was a good father to me, and I used to think that perhaps I had not been as good a daughter to him as I might have been. This thought occurred to me when I had a baby of my own, and wondered how I should feel if, when he was grown up, he were to take his own wilful way as I had done. It does make such a difference in one's point of view, with regard to all sorts of things—having a baby of one's own. For instance, I knew that Miss Coleman—Mrs. Marsh, I ought to say—had two, and when Aunt Kate told me I was actually angry about it; it seemed to me that it was just another impertinence on her part, and that the children were interlopers in my old home. I could not bear to picture them sitting on father's knee, and being carried in

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his arms, filling my place and consoling him for the loss of me. But now I was quite glad that he had them, and I sympathised with Miss Coleman. I wished she could come and nurse me now, as she used to do; how much better we should understand each other! I resolved to have baby's likeness taken as soon as possible to send home to her, and to ask her to send me the photos of her little ones in return. I was convinced, of course, that there would be no comparison between them. Doubtless her's were nice children enough—father was a particularly handsome man, in the prime of life—but my baby was really a marvel; *everybody* said so. His proportions were perfect, his skin as fine and pure as could possibly be, his litle face too lovely for words, and his intelligence simply wonderful. Before he was a week old he knew me and smiled at me. He had Tom's fair hair and straightforward blue eyes——

However, I suppose all this is silly. At any rate, the silly fashion is to call it so.

It was dreadfully hot upstairs in that

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venetian-shuttered room, but still I rallied quickly, and everything went well. The old lady was indeed a mother to me, the nurse inflexibly conscientious, and my own little maid like a faithful dog upon the doormat, constantly asking to look at the baby and to be allowed to hold him. And yet—I know it was ungrateful to them, but I could not help it—I never felt that I was properly taken care of, because Tom was not behind them. I pined for him—oh, *how* I did pine for him! —happy as I was in every other respect. While I was still weak, and inclined to be a little feverish, I fell asleep and dreamed that the Bendigo had been wrecked, and that he would never come home to see his child. I cannot describe how that dream frightened me and haunted me—that, and the memory of our last parting, when we seemed to have had so many forebodings.

"If I could only go to him!" was my constant thought, knowing that weary weeks had still to pass before he could return to me, even if his voyage prospered; and once I put

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it into words, "If we could only go to him, Mrs. Parkinson, *what* wouldn't I give!"

The old lady patted my shoulder soothingly, and assured me he would be home in no time, if I would have but a grain of patience; while I had to reflect that it was impossible to go a-travelling without money. I would have "given anything" indeed, but I had nothing to give, though Tom had amply provided for all my wants at home. Moreover, I could only have left the house, while she was in it, over the dead body of my nurse. I could manage the old lady, but not her; she was a rock of resolution where her duty was concerned.

Suddenly a series of things happened. The old lady had a telegram summoning her to the sick-bed of her son—the very son that Tom had been so good to—and flew to him, distracted. Poor old lady! My mother's heart bled for her. And next day my little maid upset a kettle of boiling water over the nurse (providentially, when the baby was not in her arms), and the poor thing had to go to

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a hospital to have the scalds dressed. She sent a substitute at once, because it was found that she was for a few days incapacitated for her work; but I was able to manage without the substitute. I told her I was now perfectly well—as in truth I was—and therefore did not require her services. And the day after that, by the English mail, I had a letter from *dear* Aunt Kate, which, when I opened it, shed a bank draft upon the floor. She had heard that I was going to have a baby, and sent fifty pounds to pay expenses. A box of baby-clothes, she said, had been despatched by the same ship; for she didn't suppose I had any money to buy them, or that, if I had, I could get anything in "that outlandish country" fit for a poor child to wear.

I went straight into town and cashed that draft, taking my son with me—proud to carry him myself, though he nearly dragged my arms off. At the same time I ascertained at the company's office that the Bendigo was hourly expected to report herself from Sydney.

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"We will go to Sydney," said I to my little companion, as we travelled home again, rich and free. "We'll get Martha's mother to come and keep house until we all return together—with *father* to take care of us."

That same night I had a wire from him. He was safe at Sydney, all well; and would I telegraph immediately to inform him how it was with me? Would I also write fully and at once, so that he might get the letter before he left?

"We will telegraph immediately, to set his dear mind at rest," I said to the son, who smiled and guggled as if he perfectly understood—and I am sure he did; "but we won't write fully and at once. We can get to him as quickly as a letter, and he would rather have us than a million letters. Oh, what a simply overwhelming surprise we shall give him!" I was so full of this blissful prospect that I never thought how I might be embarrassing him in his professional capacity.

There were no intercolonial railways then, and we could not have stood the wear and

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tear of overland travel if there had been. Nor was there any choice in the matter of sea transport. I was obliged to take the mail steamer that brought me Aunt Kate's money, for it was the only vessel going to Sydney that could get me there in time. I had to be very smart to catch her, and just managed it, leaving my home at the mercy of a plausible red-nosed charwoman who was all but a perfect stranger to me.

Of course I was an idiot—I know that; but, as Tom says, you can't put old heads on young shoulders, and don't want to; and there is no occasion to remember things of that sort now. *He* never blamed me for a moment, and I am sure I cannot regret what I did, when I weigh the pleasures of that expedition against what in the end we had to pay for them. They were richly worth it.

The voyage, even without the nursemaid whom I did not feel justified in adding to my other extravagances, not only did me no harm, but really invigorated me. A new-made mother, I had been informed, was never sea-

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sick, and my experience seemed to prove the fact; while as for baby, in spite of his catching a little cold, which he might have caught at home, the exquisite sea air must have been better for him than the gutter smells of Melbourne. He was as good as gold, and the stewardess was an angel, and we slept like tops all through our two nights on board.

It was afternoon when we entered Sydney Harbour—that beautiful harbour which I had never seen before, but had no eyes for now. All I cared to look at was my beloved Bendigo, and there she was at her berth, and the blue-peter was up! When I saw that, I felt quite faint. I ran round the deck asking everybody when she was expected to leave, and all but those who did not know said at five o'clock. It was now three. So that, with other weather, I might have missed her! And Tom would have gone home to find—— Great heavens! But with the misadventures that we did have, there is no need to count those we didn't. As it chanced, I was in plenty of time.

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It was nearly four before I could get off the mail boat, and it was considerably past that hour when I hurried up the gangway of the Bendigo, panting, and bathed in perspiration—for Sydney is a hot place in January—looking everywhere for Tom. The second officer, who knew me, uttered an exclamation as he ran to take my bag from the cabman; and the way he looked at baby—then asleep, fortunately—was very funny.

"Oh, Mr. Jones," I cried, "is the captain on board?"

"No, Mrs. Braye; he's on shore," was the reply, accompanied with violent blushes. "You must have missed him somehow. Are you—are you going back with us?"

"Of course I am," I said, as calmly as I could. "But he does not know it yet. I had some business in Sydney, and I thought I would give him a surprise. Don't tell him, please; I will go up to his cabin on the bridge and wait for him."

"He may be here any moment," said the

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young man. And, looking to right and left in an embarrassed way, he asked if he should call the stewardess.

"Not yet," I returned affably. "I will ring when I want her. He will sleep for a long time. He's such a good baby—not the least little bit of trouble." And then I turned back the lace handkerchief from the placid face, and asked Mr. Jones what he thought of that for a month-old child.

He said he was no judge, and behaved stupidly. So I left him, and went up to the bridge, where Tom had a room composed of a bunk and a bay window, entirely sacred to himself. I don't suppose a baby had ever been in it, but the pillows and things I found there made a perfect cradle. As I laid my little one down on his father's bed, I was afraid the thumping of my heart would jog him awake, but it did not. He sank into his nest without sound or movement, leaving me free to watch at the window for Tom's coming.

It was past five o'clock before he came,

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and I knew when I saw him why he was so late. He had been looking for his expected letter up to the last moment, and had now abandoned hope. I also knew that somebody on deck had betrayed my secret when I heard the change in his step as he ran upstairs. Ah —ah! Before I could arrange any plan for my reception of him I was in his arms. Before either of us could ask questions, we had to overcome the first effects of an emotion which arrested breath as well as speech. Never when we were lovers had we kissed each other as we did now.

"But what—how—why—where?" the dear fellow stuttered, when we began to collect our wits; and in the same bold and incoherent style I simultaneously gave my explanation. Half a minute sufficed to dispose of these necessary preliminaries. Then I led him into his own cabin, the doorway of which I had been blocking up.

. . . . . .

"But what are we going to do with him?" Tom asked—a singular question, I considered,

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but he was full of the business of the ship—I wondered how he *could* think about the ship at such a moment. "Hadn't you better make a nursery of my cabin on deck? It's empty, and the stewardess 'll rig you up whatever you want."

"I will make a nursery of it," I replied, "when I want to bath and dress him for the night. And, by the way, perhaps I had better do that now, before we start." For our son had been wakened out of his sleep, in order that his father should see how blue his eyes were.

"Yes, yes, do it now," urged Tom, in a coaxing way. It was sweet of him not to cloud my perfect happiness by hinting at the scandalous breach of etiquette it would be to let a baby appear on the bridge while he was taking the ship out. For my part, I never thought of it.

He took me down to the deck, now crowded with people, who stared rudely at us, and into the one cabin there, which was his own; and he called the stewardess—a delight-

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ful woman, charmed to have the captain's baby on board—and left us together, while he rushed off to speak with the superintendent of the Sydney office, I suppose about my passage. Soon afterwards we started, and until we were away at sea I was fully occupied with Harry's toilet. Then came dinner, and Tom made me go in with him, while the stewardess stayed with the child; and the short evening was taken up with preparations for the night. It was arranged that I should spend it in the nursery, of course, and I was strongly advised to retire early.

But the cabin was hot, and the outside air was cool, and I simply could not rest so far from Tom. The moonlight was lovely at about ten o'clock, so bright that, stepping out on the now deserted deck to look for him, I could plainly see his figure moving back and forth at the end of the bridge, outlined against the sky. And I could not bear it. Slipping back into my room to pick up my child and roll him in a shawl, I prepared to storm the position with entreaties that I felt

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sure my husband was not the husband to withstand.

He came plunging down the stairs just as I was about to ascend. I stopped, and called to him.

"Tom, *do* let me be with you!"

"I was on my way to you, Polly, to see if you were awake, and would like to come up for a little talk. It's quiet now."

He put his arm round my waist, and turned to hoist me upward.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "Is that——"

"Of course it is. You wouldn't have me leave him behind, all alone by himself?"

"But won't he catch his death of cold?"

"How can he, on a night like this? It will do him good. And I won't let him cry, Tom."

"Give him to me. I'll carry him up."

"*Can* you?"

He laughed, and took the little creature from me in a delightfully paternal fashion, and without bungling at all. I had been half

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afraid that he was going to turn out like so many men—like Mr. Jones, for instance—but had no misgivings after that. Even when we encountered Mr. Jones on duty, he was not ashamed to let his officer see him with an infant in his arms. Certainly he was born to be a father, if anybody ever was.

It was very stuffy in his little house, which had the funnel behind it; so he put a chair for me outside, under the shelter of the screen, and I sat there for some time. It was simply the *sweetest* night! The sea is never still, of course, however calm it may be, but its movements were just as if it were breathing in its sleep. And the soft, wide shining of the moon in that free and airy space—what a dream it was! At intervals Tom came and dropped on the floor, so that he could lean against my knee and get a hand down over his shoulder. The man at the wheel could see us, but carefully avoided looking—as only a dear sailor would do. The binnacle light was in his face, and I watched him, and saw that he never turned his eyes

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our way. As for Prince Hal, he slept as if the sea were his natural cradle. So it was.

Presently Tom went off the bridge, and when he returned a steward accompanied him, carrying a mattress, blankets, and pillows, which he made up into a comfortable bed beside me.

"How will that do?" my husband inquired, rubbing the back of a finger against my cheek. "It isn't the first time I've made you a bed on deck—eh, old girl?"

I was wearing a dressing-gown, and lay down in it, perfectly at ease. He lowered the child into my arms, punched the pillows for our heads, tucked us up, and kissed us.

"This is on condition that you sleep," he said.

"It is a waste of happiness to sleep," I sighed ecstatically. "I want to lie awake to revel in it."

"If I see you lying awake an hour hence," he rejoined, pretending to be stern, while his voice was so full of tenderness that he

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could scarcely control it, "I shall send you back to your cabin, Polly."

So I did not let him see it. But for several hours, when he was not looking, I watched his dear figure moving to and fro, and the sea, and the stars, with the smoke from the funnel trailing over them, and revelled in full consciousness of my utter bliss.

Even now—after all these years—I get a sort of lump in my throat when I think of it.

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CHAPTER III.

A PAGE OF LIFE.

Does love fly out of the window when poverty walks in at the door? No, no—of course not! Only when love is an imitation love, selfish and cowardly, as true love can never be. I am sure ours stayed with us always, no matter how cramped and starved. We never felt a regret for having married each other, even when the practical consequences were most unpleasant—never, never, not for a single instant. And yet—and yet—well, it is all over now. One need not make one's self gratuitously uncomfortable by reviving memories of hardships long gone by, and never likely to be repeated.

Another thing. *Is* it fair that a sea-captain should have such miserable wage for such magnificent work? He has no play-hours,

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like other working men, no nights' rest, no evenings at home, no Saturday holidays—no Sundays even—and no comfort of his wife and family. He is exposed to weather that you would not turn a dog into, and to fatigue only measured by the extent of human endurance; and accepts both without a thought of protest. He has the most awful responsibilities continually on his mind, as to which he is more inflexibly conscientious than any landsman living; and he is broken and ruined if an accident happens that he is but technically to blame for and did his utmost to prevent. Yet all he gets in return is a paltry twenty pounds a month! At least, that is what Tom got—with an English certificate and a record without a flaw. It is because sailors are not money-grubbers, as landsmen are, that the money-grubbers take advantage of them.

Tom used to bring his money home and give it all to me, and he almost apologised for having to ask for a little now and then, to provide himself with clothes and tobacco.

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Moreover, he never pried into my spendings, though anxious that I should be strict and careful, and pleased to be asked to advise me and to audit my small accounts. In this he was the most gentlemanly husband I ever heard of. And of course I strained every nerve to manage for the best, and prove myself worthy of the confidence reposed in me. But I was not much of a housekeeper in those days. At home Miss Coleman had attended to everything, even to the buying of my frocks; for my father had never made me an allowance—which I do think is so wrong of fathers! If you are not taught the value of money when you are a girl, how are you to help muddling and blundering when you are a married woman?—especially if you marry a poor man. I thought at first that twenty pounds a month was riches. But even at the first, and though we used enough of Aunt Kate's wedding present to cover the cost of setting up a house, there seemed nothing left over at the month's end, try as I would to be economical. When the second

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draft came I had doctor's and nurse's fees like lead upon my mind; we did not invest that hundred at all, and it melted like smoke. And then—before Harry was fairly out of arms—Phyllis was born, and I was delicate for a long time; without a second servant my nursery cares would have killed me. I thought Aunt Kate would have sent me help again, but she did not—perhaps because I had neglected to write to her, being always so taken up with household cares. And I got into arrears with the tradesmen, and into the way of paying them "something on account," as I could spare the money and not as it was due; and this wrecked the precise system that Tom had made such a point of, so that I kept things from him rather than have him worried when he wanted rest. And it was miserable to be struggling by myself, weighed down with sordid anxieties, tossing awake at night to think and think what I could do, never any nearer to a solution of the everlasting difficulty, but rather further and further off. And I know I was very cross

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and fretful—how could I help it?—and that my poor boy must often have found the home that should have cheered him a depressing place. He seemed not to like to sleep while I was muddling about, and used to look after the children, or clean the knives and boots, when he should have been recruiting in his bed for the next voyage. For I was again obliged to do as I could with one poor maid-of-all-work, and I am afraid—I really am a little afraid sometimes—that I have a tendency to be inconsiderate when I have much to think of.

By the time that Bobby was born—we had then been five years married—all the romance of youth seemed to have departed from us, dear as we were to one another. Our talk when we met was of butchers and bakers, rents and rates, the wants of the house and how they could be met or otherwise; and we had to shout sometimes to make ourselves heard above the noise of crying babies and the clack of the sewing-machine. It was exactly like the everyday, commonplace, per-

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functory, prosaic married life that we saw all around us, and to the level of which we had thought it impossible that *we* should ever sink.

Tom says, no. On second thoughts I do too. The everyday marriage was not dignified with those great moments of welcome and farewell, those tragic hours of the night when the husband was fighting the wind and sea and the wife listening to the rattle of the windows with her heart in her mouth—such as, for the time being, uplifted us above all things tame and petty. And what parents, jogging along in the groove of easy custom, can realize the effect of trials such as some of those that our peculiar circumstances imposed on us, in keeping the wine of life from growing flat and stale. The same thing happened at Bobby's birth as at Harry's. Tom was perforce away, and I might have died alone without his knowing it. Three months later the little one took convulsions and was given up by the doctor; and the father again was out of reach, and might have come home

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to find his baby underground. Never shall I forget those times of anguish and rapture—and many besides, which proved that nothing in the world was of any consequence to speak of compared with our value to one another.

But we forget so soon! And the little things have such power to swamp the big ones. They are like the dust and sand of the desert, which cover everything if not continually dredged away. And all those little debts and privations and schemings and strugglings to make ends meet that would not meet, were enough to choke one. Especially as Bobby cut his teeth with more trouble than any baby I ever had, and as I, what with one thing and another, grew quite disheartened and out of health, so that I never knew what it was not to feel tired.

The ignoble sorrows of this period—which I hate to think of—seemed to culminate on the morning of the day that I am going to tell of—at the end of which they were so joyfully dispelled.

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Bobby had cried incessantly through the night, so that I had only slept in snatches, just enough to make me feel more heavy and yawny than if I had not slept at all. I dragged myself dispiritedly out of bed, dying for the cup of tea which did not appear till an hour after its time, and was then brought to me rank and cold from standing, with no milk in it.

"I forgot to put the can out last night," was Maria's cheerful explanation, "and I waited in hopes that the milkman would come back, but he didn't. And, please'm, what shall I do about the children's breakfast?"

"You mean to say you never left a drop over from yesterday, in case of accidents?" I demanded, tears rushing into my eyes. "Oh, Ma-*ria!*"

It sounds a poor thing to cry about, but I appeal to mothers to say if I was a fool. Bobby was a bottle baby, and we had all our milk from one cow on his account; and he was ill, and the dairy at least a mile away. Rarely had I trusted Maria to remember to put

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the can out for the morning supply, delivered before she was up; I used to hang it on the nail myself. But last night, having my hands so full, I had contented myself with telling her twice over not to forget it. With this result! At any moment the poor child might awake and cry for food, and a spoonful of stale dregs was all I had for him.

There and then, with clenched teeth and a lump in my throat, and boots on my feet that had mere rags of soles to them, I set off with the milk-can to that distant dairy. It was a thick morning, and presently rained in torrents. When I arrived, drenched to the skin, I was told that all the milk was with the cart, and I had to wait half an hour until the proprietress could be persuaded to give me a little. She was unsympathetic and disobliging—I suppose because I had not paid her husband for three months. On my return home Bobby, in Maria's arms, was shrieking himself into another fit of convulsions; and the other children, catching their deaths of cold in their nightgowns, were paddling about

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on flagstones and oilcloth, fighting and squalling, and trying to light the dining-room fire. They imagined they were helping, but had spilled coals all over the carpet and used the crumb-brush to spread the black dust afterwards; and the wonder is that they didn't burn the house down.

It was not quite just perhaps—poor little things, they *were* trying their best—but the first thing I did was to box the ears of both of them and send them back to bed. I don't think I ever saw them, as babies, take so small a punishment so greatly to heart. They snuffled and sulked for hours—wouldn't even show an interest in the apricot jam and boiled rice that I gave them for their breakfast and imagined would be a treat to them—and were more vexatious and tiresome than words can say.

"I wish father was home," Harry kept muttering, in that moody way of his; it is the thing he always said when he wanted to be particularly aggravating. "Phyllis, I wish father was here, don't you?"

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"Oh," I cried, "you don't wish it more than I do! If father were here, he'd pretty soon make you behave yourselves. *He* wouldn't let you drive your mother distracted when she's already got so much to worry her, with poor little brother sick and all." Tears were in my eyes, as they must have seen, but the heartless little brats were not in the least affected.

And father's absence was an extra anxiety, for he was hours and hours behind his time. The papers reported fogs along the coast, and I thought of shipwrecks as the day wore on, and began to feel that it would be quite consistent with the drift of things if I were to get news presently that the Bendigo had gone down. I knew how he dreaded fogs, which made a good navigator as helpless as a bad one, and wondered if it implied an instinctive presentiment that a fog was to be his ruin! I remembered his telling me that if ever he was so unfortunate as to lose his ship, he should cast himself away along with her; and the appalling idea filled me not with

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anguish only, but with a sort of indignation against him.

"And he with a young family depending on him!" I cried in my heart—as if he had already done it—"and a wife who would die if he went from her!"

I was in that state of mind and health that when, early in the afternoon, I heard him come stumbling in, my solicitude for him suddenly passed, and only the bitter sense of grievance remained. The grocer had been calling in person, insolent about his account, which indeed had been growing to awful dimensions; and I was fairly sick of the whole thing. It was not my poor old fellow's fault, for he gave me his money as fast as he got it, but somehow I felt as if it was. And when he dumped down on the sofa beside me to look at Bobby, I began at once—without even kissing him—to pour out all my woes.

I was reckless with misery and headache, and did not care what I said. I told him things I had been scrupulously keeping from

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him for months—things which I imagined would harrow him frightfully, much to my sorrow when it would be too late. And he—even *he*—seemed callous! He mumbled a soothing word or two, and fell silent. I asked him for advice and sympathy, and he never answered me.

Looking at him, I saw that his eyes were shut, his head dropped, his great frame reeling as he sat, trying to prop himself with his broad hands on his broad, outspread knees.

"Tom," I cried in despair, "you're not listening to a word I'm saying!"

He jerked himself up.

"I beg your pardon, Polly. The fact is, I'm dead-beat, my dear. It has been foggy, you know, and I haven't dared to turn in these two nights."

It seemed as if *everything* was determined to go wrong. I could see that his eyelids were swollen and gummy, and that he was half stupefied with fatigue.

"What a shame it is!" I passionately complained. "What wretches those owners

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are—sitting at home in their armchairs, wallowing in luxury, while they make you slave like this—and give you next to nothing for it!"

"It's no fault of theirs," said he. "They can't help the weather. And when I've had a few hours' sleep I shall be as right as ninepence. Then we'll talk things over, pet, and I'll see what can be done."

I rose, with my sick child in my arms, and he stumbled after me into our bedroom. For the first time it was not ready for him. I had been so distracted with my numerous worries that I had forgotten to make the bed and put away the litter left from all our morning toilets; the place was a perfect pigsty for him to go into. And he coming so tired from the sea—looking to his home for what little comfort his hard life afforded him! When I saw the state of things, I burst into tears. With an extremely grubby handkerchief he wiped them away, and kissed me and comforted me.

"What the deuce does it matter?" quoth

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he. "Why, bless your heart, I could sleep on the top of a gatepost. Just toss the things on anyhow—here, don't you bother—I'll do it."

He was contented with anything, but I felt shamed and heart-broken to have failed him in a matter of this kind—the more so because he *was* so unselfish and unexacting, so unlike ordinary husbands who think wives are made for no other purpose than to keep them always comfortable. In ten minutes he was snoring deeply, and I was trying not to drop tears into the little stew I was cooking for his tea.

"At least he shall have a nice tea," I determined, "though goodness knows how I am going to pay for it."

Poor baby was easier, and asleep in his cradle; the two others had gone to play with a neighbour's children. So the house was at peace for a time, and that was a relief. It was also an opportunity for thinking—for all one's cares to obtrude themselves upon the mind—and the smallest molehills looked

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mountains under the shadow of my physical weariness.

Having arranged the tea-table and made up the fire, I sat down for a moment, with idle hands in my lap; and I was just coming to the sad conclusion that life wasn't worth living—wicked woman that I was!—when I heard the evening postman. Expecting nothing, except miserable little bills with "account rendered" on them, I trailed dejectedly to the street door. Opening it, a long-leaved book was thrust under my nose, and I was requested to sign for a registered letter.

"Ah-h-h!" I breathed deeply, while flying for a pen. "It is that ever-blessed Aunt Kate—I know it is! She seems to divine the exact moment by instinct."

I scribbled my name, received the letter, saw my father's handwriting, and turned into the house, much sobered. For father, who was a bad correspondent—like me—had intimated more than once that he was finding it as much as he could do to

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make ends meet, with his rapidly increasing family.

I sat down by the fire, opened the much-sealed envelope, and looked for the more or less precious enclosure. I expected a present of five pounds or so, and I found a draft for a hundred. The colour poured into my face, strength and vigour into my body, joy and gladness into my soul, as I held the document to the light and stared at it, to make sure my eyes had not deceived me. Oh, what a pathetic thing it is that the goodness of life should so depend upon a little money! Even while I thought that hundred pounds was all, I was intoxicated with the prospect before me—bills paid, children able to have change of air, Tom and I relieved from a thousand heartaches and anxieties which, though they could not sour him, yet spoiled the comfort of our home because they sapped my strength and temper.

I ran to wake him and tell him how all was changed in the twinkling of an eye; but when I saw him so heavily asleep, my duty as

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a sailor's wife restrained me. Nothing short of the house burning over his head would have justified me in disturbing him. I went back to my rocking-chair to read my father's letter.

Well, here was another shock—two or three shocks, each sharper than the last. My beloved aunt was dead. She had had an uncertain heart for several years, and it had failed her suddenly, as is the way of such. She went to church on a Sunday night, returned in good spirits and apparently good health, ate a hearty supper, retired to her room as usual, and was found dead in her bed next morning when her maid took in her tea. This sad news sufficed me for some minutes. Seen through a curtain of thick tears, the words ran into each other, and I could not read further. Dear, dear Aunt Kate! She was an odd, quick-tempered old lady, cantankerous at times; but how warm-hearted, how just and generous, how good to me, even when I did not care to please her! When one is a wife, and especially when one is a mother,

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all other relationships lose their binding power; but still I could not help crying for a little while over the loss of Aunt Kate. And I can honestly say that I did not think of her money until after I had wiped my eyes and resumed reading. When I turned over a leaf and saw the word, I remembered the importance of her will to all her relatives. I said to myself, "After all, the hundred pounds does come from her. It is her legacy to me." And I was sordid enough to feel a pang of disappointment because—being her last bequest—it was so small.

"We buried her yesterday," wrote father, "and the will was read after the funeral, and has proved a great and painful surprise to us. She has left the bulk of her money to a man I never even heard of, an engineer in India. Uncle John says his father was an admirer of hers when she was a girl, but she never mentioned the name—Keating—to me, and I can't understand the thing at all. She was always eccentric, and some of us think we might contest the will with a fair chance of

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success. However, my lawyer advises to the contrary, and my wife also; so I, for one, shall let it go.

"She has not altogether forgotten her own family. There are a number of small legacies, including £2,000 for myself, which will come in very usefully just now, though not a tithe of what I expected. I have also some plate and furniture. You, my dear girl, are the best off of us all. Besides jewellery and odds and ends, she has left you the interest of £10,000 (in Government securities) for life, your children after you. This will give you an income of £300 a year—small, but absolutely safe—and relieve my mind of many anxieties on your behalf." He went on to tell me about powers of attorney and other legal matters that I did not understand and thought unworthy of notice at such a moment. He also explained that lawyers were a dilatory race, and that he was advancing £100 to tide me over the interval that must elapse before affairs were settled.

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Again I went into my room and looked at Tom. How *could* he sleep in a house so charged with wild excitement! I regret to say it was that, and not grief, which made my heart throb so that I wonder he did not feel the bedstead shaking, and the very floor and walls. I ached with suppressed exclamations; I tingled with an intolerable restlessness, as if bitten by a thousand fleas. And still he lay like a log, drawing his breath deeply and slowly, with soft, comfortable grunts; and still, in an agony of self-control, I refrained from touching him. Baby woke up, moist and smiling. His tooth was through; he seemed to know that it was his business to get well at once. It is not only misfortunes that never come singly; good luck is a thing that seldom rains but it pours. Harry and Phyllis came home, took their tea peaceably, and went to bed like lambs. I sent Maria, with half a sovereign, to a savoury cook-shop where they sold fowls and hams and all sorts of nice things ready for table, and she brought back a supper fit for a prince.

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"It is all right, Maria," I assured her, in my short-breathed, vibrating voice, seeing her wonder at my extravagance. "I am rich now. I can afford the captain something better than a twice-cooked stew. Spend it all, Maria, on the best things you can get. And you shall have your wages to-morrow, and a present of a new frock."

When all was ready—the glazed chicken, the juicy slices of pink ham, the wedge of rich Stilton, the bottle of English ale—I returned again to my unconscious spouse. It was ten o'clock, and he had been sleeping with all his might for seven hours. Surely that was enough! Especially as he still had the whole night before him. I stroked his hair—I kissed his forehead—I kissed his shut eyes. He can resist everything but that; when I kiss his eyes he is obliged to stir and murmur and want kisses for his lips. He stirred now, and turned up his dear old face.

"Pol——"

"Yes, darling, it's me. Are you awake?"

He sighed luxuriously.

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"Tommy, *are* you awake?"

"Wha's th' time?"

"It's *awfully* late. Come, you won't sleep to-night if you don't get up now."

"Oh, sha'n't I? I could sleep for a week if I had the chance. Ah-hi-ow!" He yawned like a drowsy lion. "I'd sooner have twenty gales than one fog, Polly."

"I know you would. But never mind about gales and fogs and trivial things of that kind. I've something far, far more important to talk to you about—something that will make your very hair stand on end with astonishment. Only I want to be quite sure first that you are awake enough to take it in."

He called his faculties together in a moment as if I had been the look-out man reporting breakers, and was all alive and alert to deal summarily with the situation, whatever it might be. And I rushed upon my story, showed him the letter and the draft, and poured out a jumbled catalogue of all the things we could now do that wanted doing—beginning with a leaking kettle and ending

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with his professional appointment, which I had decided must be resigned forthwith.

"And we will live together always and always, like other husbands and wives, only that we shall be a thousand times happier," I concluded, as I led him in to his supper, hanging on his arm.

"No more fogs and gales, to wear you out and perhaps drown you in the end, but your bed every night, and your armchair by the fire, your home and family, and me—*me*——"

"Little woman! But you mustn't forget, pet, that I'm not thirty-eight till next birthday. A man can't give up work and sink into armchairs at that age."

"Of course he can't. We can find some nice post ashore. There are plenty of things, if you look for them."

"Not for sailor men, who know nothing but their trade."

"Oh, heaps—any amount of heaps! And you can take your time, of course. No need to hurry for a year or two. You want a long

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holiday. You have never had one yet. And *I* want *you*. What's the use of money, if we can't enjoy it together? We have not had so much as one whole month to ourselves since we were married."

"Well, a sailor's wife must accept the conditions, you know."

"Yes, when necessary. But it is not necessary now that we are people of independent means."

"Three hundred a year isn't three thousand. And we've got to educate the kids, and put by for them."

"No need to put by for them when they are to have my money after I am dead."

"For myself, then. You wouldn't like to die and leave me to sell matches in the streets?"

"Oh, Tom, don't talk about dying—now that it's so sweet to be alive!"

"My dear, you began it. I vote we don't talk any more at all, but eat our supper and go to bed. Here, sit down by me, and let

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us gorge. I have had nothing since morning, and this table excites me to frenzy."

We cut off the breast of the chicken for the children and a leg for Maria, and demolished the rest. We drank the beer between us, out of one tumbler; we devoured half of a crusty loaf, and cheese sufficient for a dozen nightmares; and I never felt so well in my life as I did after it. Tom said the same.

But sleep was far away—even from him. We had to arrange our programme for the morning—the fetching of Nurse Barber to take care of baby, the business at the bank, the settlings of pressing accounts, the beginnings of our innumerable shoppings; and whenever a silence fell that I knew I should not break, something forced me to turn over in bed with a violent fling and make loud ejaculations.

"Oh, dear, kind, sweet Aunt Kate! To think that I am so pleased at having her money that I cannot cry because she is dead! Oh, Tom, Tom! To think that we never

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need owe a penny again—never, never, as long as we live!"

This was merely the effect of shock. We sobered down next day. And it was wonderful how soon we grew accustomed to having an independent income, and to feeling that it would not go half as far as it should. Long and long had we spent the hundred pounds before the first instalment of the annuity was paid over; we thought it was never coming, and when it came it melted like snow in sunshine. One has no idea what it costs to furnish even a small house comfortably until one begins to do it, and a few doctor's bills play havoc with all one's calculations. And my husband could not stay at home with me—rather, he would not. I am sure there were dozens of situations that he might have had for the asking—a man so universally beloved and respected—but he would not ask. He was fit for the sea, he said, but would be a useless lubber ashore—a fish out of water, a stranded hulk, and things of that sort. The fact was he *preferred* the sea—in which he

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differed from most sailors—and hated streets and clubs and landsmen's pursuits. He said he should choke if he were shut up in them, and I said, with tears, that he cared more for the sea than he did for his wife and children. Of course he declared it was not so, and his feelings were hurt; but he admitted the strong affection. I was his mate as he described it, his nearest and dearest—I and the children; but the sea was his comrade, to whom he had grown accustomed—his foster mother, who had nursed him so long that she had made him feel like a part of her. A foster mother is not much of a rival to a wife so loved as I am, but, oh, how jealous of her I was!

However, I don't believe that his affection for the sea had anything to do with it. I doubt very much whether that affection was as genuine as it appeared. My conviction is that he was in terror of the possible indignity of having to live upon my money. Such utter nonsense!—when wife and husband are absolutely one, as we were.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE BROKEN CIRCLE.

I HAD my heart's desire at last—with the usual calamitous result. Of course it came when I least expected it, and in the paltriest kind of way—merely because a workman, whom I had engaged to put a new stove into the children's play-room, chose to leave his job unfinished until over Sunday, instead of clearing it off on Saturday morning, as he easily might have done. There was no school on Saturday, and it was a wet, cold day, when even the boys had to be kept indoors; so there was nothing for it but to turn them and Phyllis into the dining-room—my nice dining-room, which had lately had a new carpet—while I took the drawing-room for myself and Lily, to keep her out of harm's way. She was not very well—nor was I; and I confess that I was in a cross mood. I had all my four

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children with me then, safe under my wing, and did not know how well off I was!

During the morning they were fairly good, preparing their lessons most of the time; but after dinner they were at a loss for amusement, tired of the house, restless and mischievous—very wearing to a mother whose nerves were out of tune. Even Lily became fractious. I gave her a doll and some picture-books and my work-basket to play with, but she fiddled with them, and fidgeted, and would not settle to anything. She kept listening to the noises from the dining-room—the boys paid no heed to my repeated calls to them to be quiet—and uttering monotonous whinings to be allowed to go there.

"Mother, do let me go and play with the others."

"No, Lily; little girls must not romp about with rough boys."

"Phyllis is a little girl, and she's romping with them."

"Phyllis hasn't a bad cold, as you have."

"My cold is quite better now, mother."

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"No, it isn't. It is only a little better. And we mustn't let it get worse again by running into draughts."

"There are no draughts in the dining-room, mother. It's all shut up. I can put the flannel round my neck, mother."

Oh, I could have smacked her! But of course I didn't, poor little ailing mite—barely three years old; besides, my attention was constantly distracted by the boys, who, when not rushing into and out of the hall, yelling and slamming doors as if they wanted to bring the house down, were scuffling and thumping within the dining-room in a way to make me tremble for my good furniture. I went to them once or twice to read the riot act, and each time they left off what they were doing the moment they heard me, sat mumchance while I scolded them, almost laughing in my face, and went on worse than ever directly my back was turned. Boys will be boys, Tom used to tell me, in his easy-going way, but I don't believe in letting boys defy their mother with impunity. And when

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presently I heard the yapping of a dog in addition to their own shouts and cries, I was at the end of my patience with them, determined to assert myself effectually once for all.

Rushing into the dining-room, before they had time to hear me coming, this is what I saw. The window open—cakes of mud all over the new carpet—Bobby's dog, streaming with rain, on the nice tablecloth, barking at Phyllis's cat planted on a silk sofa cushion, which she was tearing and ravelling in her frantic claws—the children standing round, Phyllis holding her cat, Bobby his dog, and Harry inciting the impotent animals to fly at one another, all three consumed with laughter, as if it were the greatest fun in the world.

The first thing I did was to dash at Waif, knocking him out of Bobby's hands and off the table—and I shall never forgive myself for that as long as I live. It was a shabby mongrel terrier which Bobby had picked up in the street one day on his way from school, and been allowed to cure of starvation and a

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lame leg and keep for his own particular pet; and the mutual devotion of the pair was a joke of the family. Waif was now fat and strong, though as ugly as before, but when he scrambled up from the fall I had given him he limped a little on the leg that had been broken; and Bobby snatched him into his arms again, and turned upon me with blazing eyes—Bobby, who had never given me impudence in the whole course of his life.

"Hit me, mother," said he, "if you like, but don't hit him—for nothing at all."

"You call that nothing?" I cried, and pointed to the pretty terra-cotta cloth—one mass of smears and muddy footmarks. Ah, my precious boy! What would a thousand terra-cotta tablecloths matter now?

He seemed quite surprised to discover that a dog brought in from the rain and a garden that was a perfect swamp could be wet and dirty, and stared open-mouthed at the damage done. I marched him to the window and made him drop Waif out, tossed the scratching kitten after him, shut down the sash and

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locked it, and then turned to Harry. For Harry was the eldest, the ringleader, the one who ought to have known better and who set the example for the rest.

"You do this on purpose to vex me," I cried vehemently, "and because you know I am ill to-day, and that father is away!" I did not quite mean that, but one cannot help saying rather more than one means in such moments of acute exasperation.

"Do what?" returned Harry, looking as surprised as Bobby had done. "I'm not doing anything. And you never told us you were ill."

"I have a raging headache," I said—and so I had as the result of the long day's worry. "And I have been telling you the whole afternoon to be quiet, and the more I tell you, the more you disobey me. Look at that beautiful new carpet—ruined for ever! Look at that lovely cushion—simply scratched to pieces! And a great, big boy like you, who ought to be a comfort to his mother——"

But there is no need to repeat all I said

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to him; indeed, I cannot remember it; but my blood was up, and I know I scolded him severely. And he answered me back, as he alone of all the children dared to do, which of course made things worse; for if there is one thing I cannot stand it is impertinence. He was just telling me that, if I chose to regard him as a ruffian and a cad, he could not help it, when we heard a distant door open—the way a door opens to the hand of the master of the house.

"There!" I exclaimed passionately. "There's your father! We'll see what *he* says to the way you treat me when his back is turned."

Tom came in, with that bright look he always wears when he sees us after an absence. How could I have had the heart to extinguish it, and to make his children quake at sight of his dear face, instead of flying to welcome him, as was the rule on his return! But a mother's authority *must* be upheld. I said so to Tom, and he said I was perfectly right, and that it was his business to see it

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done. He bade me explain what was the matter, and I did so, softening things a little —more and more as I went on—since, after all, it was nothing so very dreadful. Perhaps I had been a little hasty and hard; I thought so when I saw how Tom was taking it. He had that inexorable look of the commander confronted with mutiny—as if really I were accusing the poor boys of murder at the least. And when I saw how they stood before him—Bob downcast and tearful, and Harry with his head up, teeth and hands clenched, too proud to quail—oh, I would have given anything to save them! But it was too late.

"I am sure they didn't mean it," I protested, laying my hand on Harry's shoulder, which felt as rigid as iron under it. "We can overlook it this time, father, dear."

"The one thing I will never overlook," he replied, "is misconduct towards you when I leave you unprotected. If they don't know the first rudiments of manliness—at their age —I must try to teach them."

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"But *that* is not the way to teach them!" I cried—almost shrieked—as he signed to them to pass out of the room before him. "Oh, Tom, don't! don't! It is all my fault!"

Harry turned and looked at me with an ice-cold smile, as if his face were galvanised, and said calmly, "It is all right, mother. It is *quite* right." And then the three of them left me, Tom himself sternly keeping me back when I tried to follow; and presently, with my head buried in the torn pillow and my hands over my ears, I heard an agonised wail from poor little Bob. Not from Harry, of course; he would be cut to pieces before he would deign to cry out. Oh, what *brutes* men are! I hated Tom—though he was Tom—with a hatred that was perfectly murderous while it lasted.

We had our tea together alone—a thing that had never happened before, on his first evening, since we had had a child old enough to sit up at table. I had sent the little girls to bed—Phyllis for punishment, Lily for her throat, and because I felt I could not stand

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her chatter—and he had sent the boys. There were the usual first-night delicacies—sweetbreads, wild ducks, honey in the combs—and for once they were uneaten and unnoticed. All my preparations for his home-coming were thrown away. He was glum and silent, evidently as upset as I was, with no appetite for anything. As for me, I felt as if a crumb of bread would choke me. And I would not speak to him—I could not—with that shriek of Bobby's in my ears.

"I suppose," he said, in a heavy voice—"I suppose I'd better resign my billet and come home, Polly. They're getting pretty old now for you to struggle with them single-handed. It's not fair to you, my dear."

I treated this remark as if I had not heard it, and he soon rose from his seat and left the room. He went into his little smoking den, shut the door behind him, and locked it.

When I thought him safely out of the way I stole off to see and comfort my poor boys. They shared the same room, their beds standing side by side, with a chair between

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them. When I crept in they were talking in a low voice together; as soon as they heard me they fell silent and pretended to be asleep. A smell of moist dog and an otherwise unaccountable protuberance implied the presence of a third culprit—and a flat contravention of one of the strict rules of the house—but I took no notice, although terrified lest Bobby's shirt and sheets should be dampened, and sickened by the thought of the fleas that would infest him. Oh, how thankful I am now that I took no notice, and did not snatch his bit of comfort from his arms!

I sat down on the chair and leaned over Harry, smoothed his hair from his brow, and kissed him. I might as well have kissed the bed-post. He is a peculiar boy—a little hard-natured and perverse—and he can never bear anybody to pity him. I was not surprised that he repulsed me, though I felt dreadfully hurt. My beloved Bobby—my angel, whom I never rightly appreciated until I had lost him—he was quite different. He kissed me back again, and whimpered when I talked to

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him, and told me he had never meant to be as naughty as father thought. Bless him! I knew he never did. I told him so. But even then he was just a little reserved with me, as if he could not quite forgive me for what I had brought upon him—which was bitter enough at the time, but an agony to think of afterwards, as it is to this day. So I went away to my room and cried in the dark, utterly miserable. And I thought to myself, "If this is how they feel towards *me*, how will they regard their father, who has treated them so brutally? Why, they will never have an atom of affection for him again!"

But when I went back to them, hoping for a warmer welcome, and anxious about their poor empty stomachs, there was Tom, sitting on the chair between their beds, chatting to them, and they to him, as if nothing had occurred—aye, although Waif had been deposed and banished. Another chair had been dragged up, and a tray stood on it—a tray piled with food, duck and sweetbread, cold beef and tongue, all mixed together—

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which he was serving out in lavish helpings, with plenty of bread-and-butter. Harry, leaning on his elbow, rested his head on his father's arm; Bob, crouched at his knees on the floor, looked up at him with his dear merry eyes, that bore no malice—not even a reproach. They did not see me at the door, where I stood a minute to watch them, suffocated by the sense of being shut out.

I did not think it was quite right of Tom. But I did not say so. When he called to me to come in and be apologised to—the boys did it handsomely, but still rather perfunctorily, I fancied—I was glad to let bygones be bygones, and to feel we were a united family once more.

And I thought the incident ended there. Nothing more was said about it while Tom remained at home, and he went away as usual, giving me—even me—not the faintest indication of what was in his mind. So that I was completely dumfoundered when, on his next return, he said, in a tremulous tone of voice and with quite a tragic air generally.

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"Well, Polly, I've done it."

"*What?*" I cried, guessing his meaning in an instant, for I remembered his remark at tea that night when we were all so unhappy. "You *don't* mean to say you have thrown up your command—thrown away everything —just *now*, when we want so badly to increase our income and not to lessen it—without a word of warning?"

"No warning?" quoth he. "Why, haven't you been at me every day for the last dozen years to do it? And quite right too. It's bad for boys to grow up without a father to look after them, and their welfare is of more importance than anything else."

"You say that, and at the same time take away all chance of their having a decent education and a fair start in the world! How am I to keep them at the Grammar School, and have a governess for the girls, and support the house and all, on my poor three hundred a year?"

I should not have said it, and could have

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cut my tongue out before the words were half uttered, but somehow the first news of the shock that we were to lose half our income, on which we already found it no easy matter to make ends meet, was overwhelming. And we were so accustomed to speak freely whatever was in our minds that I never anticipated he would take a chance remark so ill. I suppose his interview with the owners had agitated him; as I heard afterwards, the whole office had expressed regrets at his leaving the service, and said all kinds of nice and flattering things about him; otherwise I am sure he would not have given way as he did. He just turned from me, put his arms on the mantelpiece, and, dropping his head down, gave a sob under his breath. My own good husband! That ever I should have been the cause—however innocently—of bringing a tear to his dear eyes, a moment's pang to his faithful heart!

Of course he forgave me at once—he always does; and in a few minutes we were talking things over in peace and comfort,

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while I sat on his knee—for the children were in school, happily.

"As for income, Polly, you don't suppose I am going to live on you?" he said—and a very unkind thing it was to say, as I told him. "You don't imagine I intend to sit at home and twiddle my thumbs, while you take the whole burden on your little shoulders—do you?"

"I don't see why you shouldn't," I replied. "At any rate for a long while to come. I'm sure if any one ever earned the right to a thorough rest, you have. And, oh, Tom, no burden can be a burden with you here to help me!"

"Thanks, old girl. That's good hearing."

"As if you wanted to be told that! And by and by, when you have had a nice long spell, there are sure to be posts offered to you about the ports——"

"No, Polly; don't delude yourself with that idea. There are no posts for a sailor who leaves sea—that is, one or two, perhaps, and

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a hundred fellows wanting them. I should be no good at office work, among the smart hands, and the life would kill me. No, I've a better notion than that—it's been in my mind a long time, and I've been talking it over with experts, men who thoroughly understand the matter——"

"And not with me!" I interposed reproachfully.

"Well, I didn't see the use of disturbing your mind until one could do something. But now the time has come." He was quite bright and excited. "Look here, Polly—listen, dear, till I have explained fully—my idea is to take a little farm place on the outskirts of Melbourne——"

"A farm!" I broke in. "Are *you* one of those who think that farming comes by instinct and doesn't have to be learned like other trades?"

"I don't mean that kind of farm, but just a few acres of good land—more on the edge of the country than in it, you understand—near enough for the boys to get to the

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Grammar School by train or on ponies—and breed pigs——"

"Oh, pigs!" I echoed, sniffing.

"Well, if you objected to pigs, there's poultry. With a few incubators we could rear fowls enough to supply all Melbourne. Or bees. There's a great trade to be done in honey if you know how to set about it. Bees feed themselves, and flowers cost nothing —I particularly want us to live among plenty of flowers—and I could make the boxes myself. But pigs are the thing, Polly. I've gone into the question thoroughly, and there's no doubt about it. You see, we should be able to keep cows—think how splendid to give the children fresh milk from our own dairy, as much as they can drink!—and we could send the rest to a factory and get the buttermilk back for the pigs. And vegetables—of course we'd have a big garden—and they'd eat all the surplus that would otherwise go to waste, and the fallen fruit, and the refuse from the kitchen; so that really the cost of feed would be next to nothing. The pork

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would be first-class on such a diet, given the right breed to begin with, and what Melbourne markets couldn't absorb we might ship frozen to England."

And so on.

Well, it was a fascinating picture, and his enthusiasm was contagious. I, too, thought it would be lovely to live amongst cows and flowers, and at the same time be making a fortune out of our Arcadian surroundings. So I went in for the little farm, and all the three classes of profitable stock—pigs, fowls, bees—in short, everything. What would have happened to us if Tom had not made a few unexpected thousands by the purest accident, I don't know. He did a little deal in mining shares, under the direction of a strangely disinterested friend who was expert at that business, and so saved us all from ruin. I may add that it was his sole exploit of the kind. I would not let him gamble any more—beyond putting an annual pound or two in Tattersall's Sweeps—because, although he thought he had been very smart, he was as

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ignorant as a confiding infant of the ways of money dealers, and never could have experienced such another stroke of luck. He was easily persuaded to let well alone, as always to defer to and see the reasonableness of any wish of mine.

It was before we had fairly plunged into our messes and muddles—in the very beginning, when the *couleur de rose* was over all—when the dilapidations of our country cottage were all repaired, and everything in the most beautiful order—when the fields were rich with spring grass and the scent of wattle-blossom, and the sleek cows had calved, and the hens were clucking about with thriving families of chicks—when the bee boxes were still a-making, and the two first pigs only in their smart new sty—when the children, released from the schoolroom, were scampering everywhere with their father, who was more of a child than any of them, and growing fat and rosy on the sweet air and the pure milk—when we were telling one another all day that we never were so happy and so well off—it

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was then that the calamity of our lives befell us.

A small creek touched the borders of the two paddocks that we called our farm, and, like all creeks, was fringed with wild vegetation, bushes and trees that interposed a romantic screen between its little bed and the world of prosaic agriculture. It so happened that the children—like many thousands of native Australians, far older than they—had never seen the bush. When they had wanted change of air Tom had taken them to sea; and as he had never had holidays himself, and I had never cared to go away from home without him, we were nearly in the same case. That strip of scrub was true bush, as far as it went, and we were delighted in it.

We were too busy just then to go thither in daytime, and would not allow the children to ramble there alone, for fear of snakes—although it was much too early and too cool for them; besides which, there were none—but we would take the fascinating walk about sundown in a family party, and sometimes

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have our tea there, returning after dark with strange treasures of leaf and insect, clear pebbles that we made sure were topazes in the rough, and stones with mica specks in them that we thought were gold. And once we went there in moonlight—the full moon of our first October—when it was mild and balmy, and we could easily imagine ourselves in forests primeval untrodden by a human foot except our own! How well I remember it—as if it were yesterday!—the enormous look of the trees in that beautiful, deceptive light, and how we stood in an ecstatic group under one of them to look up at an oppossum sitting in the fork of a dead branch.

Many people think that oppossums, like snakes and laughing jackasses, are common objects of the country in all its parts; but that is not the case nowadays with any of the three, and none of our family had beheld the dear little furry animal, except dead in a museum or torpid in the Zoölogical Gardens, while it had been one of the great ambitions

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of our lives to do so. And here he was, alive, alert, and unmistakable, his ears sticking up and his bushy tail hanging down, sitting against the moon, as I had seen roosting pheasants in the woods at home, looking down at us with the intense interest that an opossum is able to take in things at that hour. The excitement was tremendous. The boys literally danced round and round the tree, and Waif was beside himself; he made frantic leaps upward, turning somersaults in the rebound, wildly tore at the bark of the tree and the earth at its roots, and filled the quiet night with his impassioned yaps and squeaks. He also, to the best of our belief, had never seen an oppossum before; yet he was as keen as a foxhound after a fox to get at and destroy it.

The little animal did not seem to mind. It sat still and gazed at us, as is the way of an oppossum, even when you have no camp-fire or lantern to mesmerise and paralyse it; we could almost fancy that we saw its fixed eyes, large and liquid, in the light of

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the moon. And suddenly Bobby ejaculated, from the depths of his heart, "Oh—*oh*—if *only* I'd got my gun!"

We took no notice—never heeded the warning given us—but only laughed to hear the little chap talking of his gun as if he were an old sportsman. It was a small single barrel, presented to him on his going to the country by his godfather, Captain Briggs (much to my dismay at the time, and the natural chagrin of the elder brother, who should have been the first to possess one), and Tom had given the child but two lessons in the use of it—shooting bottles from the top of the paddock fence.

Being without a gun, the boys flung aloft such missiles as came to hand, and, when a stick of wood touched the branch it sat on, the 'possum ran along it to a place where it was lost in leaves. Then we bethought ourselves of the late hour, called off Waif, and went home to bed—to bed, and to sleep as tranquil and unforeboding as the sleep of other nights.

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The next day was exceptionally full of business. Recreation was not thought of. It was nine o'clock when we left off work—Tom and I.

Lily was long in bed, but the other children had no proper hour for retiring at this unsettled time. I went to the sitting-room to look for them, and found only Phyllis there. The lamp was not lit, nor the blinds drawn. I noticed that the moon was up, and by its light saw her crouched at one of the windows, pressing her face against the glass. I asked her what she was doing there, and she did not hear me; on my repeating the question, she sprang up with such a start of fright that I at once divined mischief somewhere.

"Where is Harry?" I cried sharply. Somehow it was always Harry, my handsome first-born, that I expected things to happen to.

Phyllis stammered and shuffled, and then said that Harry had gone to look for Bobby.

"And where is Bobby?"

She seemed still more reluctant to reply,

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but suddenly exclaimed, with an air of joyful relief, "Oh, there he is! There he is! There's Waif—he can't be far off!"

She followed me to the verandah, whither I went to meet and reproach my poor little fellow for having strayed without leave, and there was no boy visible—only the dear, ugly, faithful dog for whose sake all dogs are beloved and sacred for ever and ever. Waif ran to my feet, pawed them and my skirts, squirmed and jumped, yelped and whined, all the time looking up at me with eyes that were full of desire and supplication—trying to tell me something that at first I could not understand. I took a few steps into the garden, and he scampered down a pathway to the gate; seeing I did not follow so far, he ran back, seized a bit of my frock in his teeth, and tried to drag me with him.

"What does he want?" I called to Tom, as he sauntered towards me, pipe in mouth. "Tom, Tom, *what* does it mean?"

"Where's Bob?" was his instant question.

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"Harry has gone after him—Harry is with him—Harry will bring him home," piped Phyllis, trembling like a leaf. Then she burst into tears. "Oh, mother—oh, father—I heard the gun such a long, long time ago!"

The gun! Who would have dreamed of *that?*—locked up in a wardrobe, as we supposed, and forbidden to be so much as looked at except under parental supervision. At the word our hearts jumped, and seemed to stop beating.

"He wanted to shoot the oppossum and cure the skin for a present to you on your birthday, mother. And he wanted it to be a secret—for a surprise to you."

Waif whined and ran, and we ran after him—Tom in silence, I wailing under my breath, already in despair and heart broken. I can see the devoted creature now, pattering steadily over the moonlit paddocks towards the creek and the trees, stopping every now and then to make sure that we were coming; and see him tracking through the scrub with

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his nose to the ground, and hear his little uneasy whimper when for a moment he could not perceive us.

Once we stopped at the sound of a distant whistle, and I shrieked with joy.

"No," said Tom gently. "That's Harry calling him."

And we came to the place where we had seen the oppossum the night before. The moonbeams trickled through the branches from which it had looked down upon our happy, united family, and just where we had stood together there was a dark something on the ground. Waif ran up to it and licked it——

. . . . . .

I can't write any more.

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CHAPTER V.

A LITTLE MISUNDERSTANDING.

It was years, literally, before I got over it. Indeed, I have never got over it—never shall, while I have any power to remember things. Death—we all know, more or less, what it means to the living whom it has robbed. To lose a child—the mothers know, at any rate! It is no use talking about it. Besides, there are no words to talk with that can possibly explain.

I often hear the remark that my husband has the most patient temper in the world, and I realise its truth when I think of that dreadful time—how I must have wearied and discouraged him, and how he never once reproached me for it, even by a glum look. He knew I could not help it. For one thing, I was ill—physically ill, with the doctor com-

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ing to see me. He ordered me tonics, stimulants, a complete change of scene, and so on, but no doctor's prescriptions were any good for my complaint. Winding a watch with a broken mainspring won't make it go. Tonics gave me headaches—tonics accompanied by constant tears and sleeplessness—and, hideous as the house was, with an empty place staring at me from every point to which I could turn my eyes, I knew it would be worse elsewhere. I clung to my own bed, my own privacy, my home where I could do as I liked and shut out the foolish would-be sympathisers and their futile condolences; and I could not bear to leave the other children. Once you have lost a child, you never again feel any confidence that the rest are safe; you seem to *know* they are going to die if they but catch a cold or scratch a finger, and that they will have no chance at all if you let them out of your sight. Besides, there were things to see to—the poultry, for instance, which was under my charge—if only I could have seen to them! I tried, but sorrow made me stupid;

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and when the incubator was found stone-cold, and again overheated, and on one occasion burnt to ashes with dozens of poor chicks inside, and when dozens more were drowned in a storm for want of timely shelter—all fine, thriving birds, when you couldn't get a decent turkey in Melbourne for under a pound —I suppose it was my fault. But Tom always said, "Never mind—don't you worry yourself, Polly," and his first thought was to get me a glass of wine. He was like an old nurse in the way he cosseted and coddled me. When I was more ill than usual, he thought nothing of sitting up all night by my bedside, and making little messes for me in the kitchen with his own hands. He never even said, as I have heard men say at the first starting of tears—not after they have been flowing, like mine, for weeks and weeks—"Why don't you make an effort to control yourself? You know perfectly well that crying only makes you worse and does nobody any good" —as if a poor mother cried from choice and perversity and the pleasure of doing it, when

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her heart was broken! He knew my heart was broken. He understood. No one else understood. They all thought I could control myself if I liked. Some of them said so, and told one another, I am sure, though I did not hear them, that it was the calm and composed ones who felt the most. That is the theory of books and cold-hearted people; I don't believe in it for a moment. Whenever I see a woman bearing up, as they call it, without showing ravages in some way or other, I know what supports her—not more courage, but a harder nature than mine. A man is different. Tom mourned for our little son with all his heart, though he did not show it; and he did not show it because he is so unselfish. He thought of me before himself, and would not add a straw to my burden. Never was a tenderer husband in this world! I believe those women thought him foolish and weak-minded to indulge me as he did, but that was envy, naturally; they did not know, poor things, what it was to have such a staff to lean on.

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However, one day, when I was showing him how thin I had grown, taking up handfuls of "slack" in a bodice that had been once tight for me, he began to look—not impatient or aggrieved, but determined—as he used to look on board ship when the law was in his own hands.

"Polly," he said, "this has gone on long enough. I'm not going to stand by and see you die by inches before my eyes. Something must be done. I shall take you to sea."

"To sea!" I exclaimed. "We can't leave the children. We can't leave the farm. We can't afford——"

"I don't care," he broke in. "I'm not going to lose you, if I can help it, for anybody or anything. You're just ready to fall into a rapid decline, or to catch some fatal epidemic or other, and I can't have it, Polly; it must be put a stop to before it is too late. The sea's the thing. The sea's what you want. Come to that, it's what I want myself; I've got quite flabby from being away from it so long. It would brace us up, both

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of us, and nothing else will. You pack a few clothes, pet, and I'll go into Melbourne and look up a nice boat. Don't you bother your head about the farm or the children or anything—I'll see that they're left all safe."

He was so firm about it that I had to give in. The sea, of course, was not like any other change of air and change of scene—it did seem to promise refreshment and renovation, peace even greater than that of my home, where I still suffered from the mistaken kindness of neighbours coming to expostulate with and to cheer me. Besides, when Tom said he had got flabby for want of it, I noticed that he was not looking well. There could be no doubt about the proposed trip being beneficial to him—I must have urged him to take it for his own health's sake—and I could not be left without him. So I mustered a little energy to begin preparations while he went to town; for though I had begged for time to think the matter over, he would not hear of delay. I never knew him so resolute, even with a crew.

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At night he brought back a brighter face than had been seen in our house for many a long day. I was sitting up for him, and even I had stirrings in my heavy heart of a reviving interest in life. All day I had been thinking of our old voyage in the Racer—remembering the beautiful parts of it, forgeting all the rest.

"Well, Polly," said he; "did you wonder what was keeping me so late? The old man" —he meant the head of his old firm—"insisted on my dining with him, and I couldn't well refuse. Talked about everything as frank and free as if I'd been his brother—all the business of the old shop—and said they'd give a hundred pounds to have me back again. By Jove, if it wasn't for you and the children—no, no, I don't mean that; we're happiest as we are—or will be when you are well and heartened up a bit. What do you think, Polly? I'm to take the old Bendigo her next trip. Watson hasn't had a spell for years, and there's a new baby at his place; I saw Watson first—he put me up to it—but

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the old man was ready to do anything I liked to ask him. 'Certainly,' says he; 'by all means, and whenever you choose. And bring the missus, of course—only too proud to have her company on any ship she fancies.' You know he always thought a deal of you, Polly; I declare he was quite affectionate in his inquiries after you—never thought he could be so kind and jolly. I could have got free passages for both of us easy enough, but it's pleasanter to work for them; and I don't think, somehow, that I could feel at home in the old Bendigo anywhere but on the bridge."

"And I should not like to see you anywhere else," I said; "not if we paid full fares twice over. And how nice not to have to pay, when the farm is keeping us so short! How nice an arrangement altogether! I can be upstairs with you—the old man would wish me to do whatever I liked—and have more liberty than would be possible if another was in command, and so can you. It's a charming plan! And the Bendigo, too—

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our own old Bendigo! Oh, Tom, do you remember *that night!*"

It was some years since he had left the boat on board of which he had been introduced to his eldest son; but whenever we recalled the time that he was captain of her our first thoughts pictured the moonlit bridge and the baby; at any rate mine did. And in my terribly deepened sense of the significance of motherhood nothing could have suited me better than to go back to the dear place where my mother-life began, for it did not properly begin until Tom shared it with me. I would sooner have chosen the Bendigo to have a trip in—if I had the choice—than the finest yacht or liner going.

So we went to bed almost happy. And two days later, having been quite brisk in the interval, safeguarding our home and children as completely as it could be done, we walked down the familiar wharf, amongst the bales and cases, to where the steamer lay, feeling exhilarated by the thought of our coming holiday, as if old times were back again. It

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was on the verge of winter now and an exquisite afternoon. Even the filthy Yarra looked silky and shimmering in the mild sunlight, tinted rose and mauve by the city smoke; and the vile smells were kept down by the clean sharpness of the air, so that I did not notice them. We were to sail at five, but went on board early so that Tom could gather the reins into his hand and have all shipshape before passengers arrived.

How pleasant it was to see the way they welcomed him! Mr. Jones was first officer now (and had babies of his own), and some of the old faces were amongst the crew. The head steward was the same, and the head engineer, and the black cook who made pastry so well; and they all smiled from ear to ear at the sight of their old master, making it quite evident to me that they had found poor Watson, as they would have found any one else, an indifferent substitute for him. Above all, there was the "old man," as he was irreverently styled—the important chief owner—in person, down on purpose to receive me, with a

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bouquet for me in his hand. Dear, kind old man! He was something like Captain Saunders in his extreme admiration and respect for "pretty Mrs. Braye," as I was told they called me, and nothing could have been friendlier than his few words of sympathy for my trouble and his real anxiety to make me comfortable on board. One might have imagined I was an owner myself by the fuss they all made over me. It always gratified me—on Tom's account—that I was never put on a level with the other captains' wives.

I had the deck cabin again, and we went there for afternoon tea. The steward brought cakes and tarts and all sorts of unusual things, to do honour to the special occasion; and I put my flowers in water, wearing a few of them, and it was all very nice and cheerful. I felt better already, although we had not stirred from the wharf, and although a New Zealand boat close by us was turning in the stream, stirring up the dead cats and things with her propeller, and making a stench so powerful that it was like pepper to the nose.

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Then, as five o'clock drew near, the "old man" went to look after business about the ship, and Tom to put on his uniform. How splendid he looked in it! Almost the only regret I had for his leaving the sea was that he could no longer wear the clothes which so well became him. Talk about the fascination of a red coat! I never could see anything in it. But a sailor in his peaked cap and brass buttons is the finest figure in the world.

I was just going to meet him and tell him how nice he looked, when one of the lady passengers who had been coming on board, and whom I had been manœuvring to avoid, cut across my bows, so to speak, and rushed at him like a whirlwind. I really thought the woman was going to throw her arms round his neck.

"Oh, Captain Braye!" she exclaimed loudly, "how too, too charming to see you here again. Have you come back to the Bendigo for good? Oh, how I hope you have! Do you know, I was going to Sydney by the mail, and was actually on my way to the P.

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& O. office, when somebody told me you were taking Captain Watson's place. I said at once, 'Then no mail steamers for me, thank you. No other captain for me if I can get Captain Braye.' And so here I am. I managed to get packed up in a day and a half."

I could see that Tom looked quite confused. We had both hoped so much that the people would all be strangers who would leave us alone, and he guessed the annoyance I should feel at the threatened curtailment of our independence by this forward person. But there was no need for him to inveigle her out of earshot, and there stand and talk to her for ever so long, as if there were secrets between them not for me to overhear. I know what she wanted—I heard her ask for it—whether she could have the deck cabin as before! A very few seconds should have sufficed to answer *that* question. She was a stylish person in her way, and her clothes were good, and the servants paid court to her; I asked one of them who she was, and he said the "lady" of a merchant of some standing in

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Melbourne—just the class of passenger we were most anxious to be without. When their confabulation was at an end Tom brought her to the bench where I was sitting and introduced her to me.

"My wife, Mrs. Harris—Mrs. Harris, dear—who has sailed with me before."

"Often," said Mrs. Harris, extending a bejewelled hand. "We are very old friends, the captain and I."

"Indeed?" I said, bowing. He had never mentioned her name to me. But, as he explained when I told him so, he couldn't be expected to remember the names of the thousands of strangers he carried in the course of the year. I reminded him that she considered herself not a stranger, but a friend; and he said, with a laugh, "Oh, they all do that."

I confess I did not take to Mrs. Harris. I should not have liked any one coming in our way as she did, when we wanted to be free and peaceful, but she was particularly repugnant to me. She gushed too much; she talked too familiarly of Tom—to me also, not discrim-

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inating between one captain's wife and another; and she accosted the servants and officers as they passed quite as if the ship belonged to her. However, I stood it as long as she chose to sit there, making herself pleasant, as she doubtless supposed. As soon as it occurred to her to go and look at her cabin I seized my hood and cloak, and went to seek sanctuary on the bridge with Tom. It was nearly six o'clock, and he was just casting off.

"Oh, Polly," he said, turning to me with a slightly worried air, "you wouldn't mind staying on deck till we get down the river a bit, would you, pet? It don't look professional, you know, for ladies to show up here. And Mrs. Harris might——"

I interrupted him in what he was going to say, because anything to do with Mrs. Harris had nothing whatever to do with the case.

"Passengers," said I, "are one thing—the captain's wife is another—*quite* another—and especially when the old man has asked me, as a sort of favour to himself, to make myself at home, as he calls it. Is he on the

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wharf, by the way? I should like to wave a hand to him. It would please him awfully. Thank Heaven, we are not subject to Mrs. Harris, nor to anybody else, on board this ship. That's the beauty of it."

"I feel in a sense subject to Watson," said Tom, "and he's a punctilious sort of chap. I don't care to seem to make too free with his command—for it's his, not mine. And there are heaps of people about besides the old man. You really would oblige me very much, Polly——"

"Oh, of course, dear!"

I saw his point of view, and at once effaced myself. I went into the little bridge house, just behind the wheel—he was satisfied with that—where I could see him close to me through the bow window, and speak to him when I chose. He lit the candle lamp at the head of the bunk, so that I could lie there and read; but I did not want to read. I preferred to stand by the window, which held all there was of table—the top of drawers and lockers—on which I spread my arms, prop-

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ping my face in hollowed palms, and to look out upon the river with the sunset upon it, and the fading daylight, and the starry lights ashore. To call that city-skirting stream romantic is to provoke the derision of those who know it best, but it *was* romantic that night —to me. Anything can be romantic under certain circumstances, in certain states of atmosphere and mind.

We were alone together. The dinner-bell rang downstairs, but Tom never left the bridge till he was out of the river, and I did not need to ask him to let me share his meal. The steward brought us up a tray, and we stood in the warm little cabin—the table was not made to sit at—and ate roast chicken and apple pie, like travellers at a railway buffet, Tom stepping out and back between hasty mouthfuls to see that all was right. He was intensely business-like, and as happy as a boy at his old work. We both had the young feeling that comes to holiday-makers who don't have a holiday very often. I could not help it.

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Then—when we steamed out between the river lights into the bay—how we sniffed the first breath of the salt sea! And what memories it brought to us!—to me, at least, who had been so long away from it. The passengers were at dinner still, and it was falling dark, and there were no spectators save the man at the wheel, who was nothing but a voice, an echo of the quiet word of command, most pleasant to hear; I was free to roam the bridge from end to end, hanging to my husband's supporting arm—to bathe myself in air that was literally new life to both of us. Cold and clean and briny to the lips—oh, what is there to equal it in the way of medicine for soul and body? What sort of insensate creatures can they be who do not love the sea?

Hobson's Bay was ruffled with a south wind—belted round with twinkling lights that grew thicker and brighter every moment, a gleaming ring of stars set in the otherwise invisible shores, in a dusk as soft as velvet. Somewhere amongst them, doubtless, was the

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lighted window that had once been mine, where I used to stand half a dozen lamps and candles in a bunch, to show Tom that I was watching for him when he used to pass out after nightfall. Our eyes turned in that direction simultaneously.

"When we are old folks, Polly," said he, with an arm round my shoulder, "when the kids are all grown up and out in the world, and you and I settle down alone again, as we did at the beginning, I should like us to have a little place somewhere where we could see blue water and the ships going by."

"Yes," I said at once, feeling exactly as he did—that though the farm and our country home were well enough under present circumstances, they would not be our choice when we had only ourselves to think of —that the sea was the sea, in short, and had reclaimed our allegiance—"yes, that is what we will do. We will end our married life where we began it—with this beautiful sound in our ears!"

We had turned the breakwater at Wil-

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liamstown, and were meeting the wind and tide of the outer bay, which was a little ocean this fresh night. The sharp bows of the Bendigo, and her threshing screw astern, made that noise of racing waves and running foam which was thrilling me like music and champagne together, so that I had no words to describe the sensation. My hair was blown hard back from my forehead and out of the control of hairpins; my face felt as if smacked by an open hand, and I had to screw up my eyes and pinch my lips together to stand the blow; I felt the keen blast pierce to my skin through all the invalid wrappings that I was swathed in—and it was lovely! Tom thought I should catch cold, but I knew better, though I was glad to be tied into his 'possum rug, with an oilskin overall to take the flying spray; and I insisted on staying out with him till nearly midnight—till we had passed the furious Rip and were battling with the real swell of the real ocean, which tossed the steamer like a cork without making me seasick. It was squally and galey and dark as a

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wolf's mouth—neither moon nor stars—only the lighthouse lights which were all we needed, and the white streaks in the black sea which were the long rollers coming to meet us. And I felt as safe as—there is nothing that can give a notion of how safe I felt. My husband took care of me as he used to do on the Racer, only fifty thousand times more carefully, because he was my husband. Ah, how sweet it was! With all our sorrows, how happy we were! And might have remained so if we had not been interfered with.

But that wretched woman spoiled it all. I had forgotten her altogether during the evening, when dinner and darkness and the rough weather kept her from us; I forgot her in the night, which I spent in my deck cabin so as to leave Tom his bunk on the bridge for such snatches of sleep as he had a mind for; the deck as well as the cabin was my own—his and mine, for he still came down at intervals to look at me through the open door and assure himself that I was all right—and the common herd were under it. But when I

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emerged in the morning, just as the breakfast-bell was ringing, the first thing I saw was Mrs. Harris coming down the stairs which had "no admittance" plainly affixed to them, and Tom in attendance on her as if she were the Queen. She descended backwards, feeling each step with her glittering pointed shoe, slower than any tortoise, and he guided her with one hand and held her skirts down with the other, out of the wind. It was a windy morning, but sunshiny and beautiful, and I had intended to enjoy my first meal in the air and in privacy with my husband, as I had done the last.

I suppose I looked my surprise, for they both seemed to colour up when they perceived me standing and watching them. In one breath they bade me a loud good morning, and made unnecessary announcements about the weather.

"You have been on the bridge?" I questioned, with my eyes fixed on the brass plate which proclaimed the bridge sacred.

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Harris gaily. "It's

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the nicest place I know to be on, especially at this time of day. Many an early visit have I paid the captain up there, haven't I, Captain?"

I lifted eyebrows at Tom, but he would not look.

"Got an appetite for breakfast, Polly?" he shouted, taking my arm. "Come along, and let's see if you don't do your doctor credit."

"I am not going to the saloon," I returned quietly, disengaging myself; "I am going to have my breakfast on the bridge with you."

"But I'm not going to breakfast there. I'm off duty, and we may as well be comfortable when we can."

Then he congratulated us both on being such good sailors as to be able to go to breakfast the first morning, and, not to make a fuss, I let him take me down into the saloon, and seat me at the public table by his side, *vis-à-vis* with Mrs. Harris. He spoke to other passengers, shaking hands with some, and intro-

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ducing me to one or two. A rather nice man talked to me throughout the meal, while Mrs. Harris monopolised Tom entirely.

This was not what I had come to sea for, and so, as soon as I had finished, I slipped away, ran up to the bridge, got out a little chair, and prepared for a quiet morning with my husband, where no one had the right to disturb us. In fact, I was fully resolved to defend that bridge, if need were, against unauthorized intruders. Mrs. Harris might have done what she liked with it and him in those old times that she was for ever flinging in my face. She would not do it now.

Scarcely had I opened my workbag and threaded my needle when up she came as bold as brass, with a yellow-back under her arm. It was too much. I felt that, if I were to make any stand at all, it must be now or never, or I should be altogether trodden under foot. So I looked at her with an air of calm inquiry, and said, "Oh! Mrs. Harris—do you want anything?"

"No, thanks," she replied in an off-hand

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tone. "The steward is bringing up my chair."

"Bringing it *up?—here?*"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"Only that—perhaps you don't know—nobody is allowed on the bridge. The notice is stuck up against the stairs."

"Then why are you here?" she retorted, bristling.

"I am the captain's wife."

"I presume the captain's wife is as much a passenger as the rest of us," she argued, with an offensive laugh. "I presume the captain can do what he likes with his own bridge, at any rate. If *he* gives one the freedom of the city, one certainly has it, beyond question; and I have always been accustomed to sit here when travelling with him. Thank you, steward—in this corner, please."

She took possession of her chair.

"If one person has the freedom of the city," I said, trying to keep my voice from shaking, "all should have it. He has no business to make distinctions where all are equal."

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"All are not equal," she cried, reddening. And I remembered that she was a considerable person in her own eyes. But I said firmly, "Pardon me. All who pay the same fares are on the same footing—or should be. And there is not room here for everybody."

"The captain," said she, "can entertain his friends as he chooses, and I am one of his oldest friends, besides being related to his owners. And as for his having no business to do this or that—oh, my dear Mrs. Braye, do allow the poor man to know his own business best—I assure you he knows it perfectly, nobody better—and let him be master, at any rate, on his ship, whatever he may be in his home."

She laughed again, as she settled herself and opened her book. I was simply speechless with indignation. But, even had I been able to speak, I was not one to bandy words with that sort of person. I just rolled up my work, quietly rose, and went downstairs to my cabin on deck.

"Why do you go away?" she asked, as I

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passed her. "Isn't the bridge big enough for us both?"

"No," I replied. And that was my last word to her.

Going down the stairs, I met Tom coming up. He said, "Hullo, Polly, where are you off to?" I looked at him steadily—that's all. And his face clouded over. He passed on, leaving me alone.

But they were not long together. Five minutes later I heard her voice suddenly through the open port of my cabin—that horrible deck cabin, where I was surrounded and pressed upon by talking, boot-clumping passengers, who just could not spy in upon me because I had door shut and window curtain down. Doubtless she did it on purpose. She must have known where I was, seeing that I was not on the bridge or sitting out on deck. She was speaking to some man of her acquaintance.

"It is always a mistake," she said, "for captains to have their wives on board. I wonder the owners allow it. It spoils the comfort

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of the other passengers—who, after all, are the chief persons to be considered—and demoralises the poor fellows to such an extent that they are not like the same men. Look at Captain Braye, whom I've known for ages—the dearest old boy you can imagine when he's let alone—it's pitiful to see him henpecked and cowed, and afraid to call his soul his own, shaking in his very shoes before that vixen of a woman!" Her companion said something that I could not hear—I believe it was my pleasant neighbour at breakfast whom she was trying to set against me—and then she put on the crowning touch. "It is always the fate of those exceptionally nice men," said she, "to marry women who don't know how to appreciate them."

I wondered for a moment if I could have heard aright. It was hard to believe in such consummate insolence—such a wild, malignant, perversion of facts. To talk of *Tom* as a henpecked husband! To dub *me*, of all people in the world, a vixen!! To say that I —*I*—did not appreciate him!!! The thing

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was too utterly ludicrous to be taken seriously, and yet it made me so angry that I could hardly contain myself. It made me feel that it would have been a pleasure to rush out upon her and tear her hair from her head, just like the real vixens do. I felt that my husband, who was also the commander of the ship, ought to have spared me this gross indignity, which could not have occurred if he had respected his position, and kept himself to himself.

Knowing that she was not with him now, I went back to the bridge. But alas and alas! The bridge, that had been a little paradise, was a place despoiled. Though the serpent had gone out of it, she had been there and poisoned everything. Tom was not the same to me. All the pleasure of our trip was at an end. I had a wretched day, and at night a gale came on, and I was seasick for the first time. He did not know it, and I would not send for him. Oh, it was horrible! It was tragical! It was heart-breaking! I can't talk about it any more.

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People came to meet her at Sydney, but she could not leave without a ceremonious goodbye to her dear captain. She was calling for him everywhere while he was busy making fast, and when she got him she shook hands two or three times over, standing apart with him as at first, regardless of me. Goodness knows I did not want to intrude, yet it was impossible to help noticing the fuss she made. I heard her say—I am quite *sure* I heard her—that she was coming back with us; meaning, of course, with him. She explained that she had but a day's business to do in Sydney, and would then be able to return by the "dear old Bendigo"—I distinctly caught those three words, in her high-pitched voice. And I thought to myself that this would really be more than I could stand —more than I could in reason be expected to stand. In fact, I was so enraged that I was strongly tempted to put it to my husband that he must make his choice between her and me. However, on second thoughts, I perceived that it would be more

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dignified to say nothing, but to let my acts speak for me. We had never been accustomed to bicker between ourselves, he and I, and to a certain extent he was not responsible for the situation. Any one not suffering from madness or an infectious disease had the right to travel in the ship; he could not help it. But if he could not turn the otherwise objectionable person off, he could keep him or her in the passengers' proper place. My grievance with him was that he did not keep that woman in her place.

Being quite determined not to have another voyage with her, and not wishing to say nasty things to him about it, I was glad when an old acquaintance, paying us a call on board, asked me to stay awhile with her, for the further benefit of my health, representing that the time covered by the sea trip was all too short to recruit in.

"Thank you very much," I answered, on the spur of the moment. "I really think I will. I was never in Sydney but once, and then I had no chance to see the beauties of the

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place, of which I have heard so much; and I daresay it would do me good to have a longer change."

I was aware of Tom's utter, silent astonishment, but I would not look at him; I left him to read the riddle for himself. When he spoke it was to quietly fall in with the proposal, adding suggestions that would have made it difficult for me to draw back if I had wanted to do so. He was so ready to leave me, indeed, that I fancied he *wanted* to get rid of me—of course he did not, but any one would have thought so—and naturally that made me bitter. I spoke but little to him afterwards, and he was certainly cold to me—he seemed to divine my suspicions and to resent them—and I did not go to see him off; I could not. In short, our holiday was entirely and irreparably ruined.

I believe I cried nearly the whole time that I was in Sydney. It did seem hard, in my state of health and under the sad circumstances, to be stranded amongst strangers, who did not understand my sorrows, nor my habits

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of life, and gave me none of the little pettings and coddlings that I needed and was accustomed to; and the thought of that woman going home with Tom, having the deck cabin, sitting on the bridge with him of nights, making free with the whole ship, usurping my place and privileges, drove me simply frantic —until one day I met her in the street, and found she had not gone with him after all.

Shaken all to pieces with the awful overland journey, more dead than alive, I reached home a day or two after him, and discovered him calmly digging the garden, as if he had forgotten my very existence. When he saw me he smiled in an odd, constrained way, and said, as though it didn't matter one way or the other: "Well, Polly? Had about enough of it?"

Angry as I was with him, I could not maintain any dignity at all—I was too spent and weary. I broke down completely, and he took me into the tool-shed to comfort me—took me into his arms, where I had simply ached to be ever since I had left them, driven

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out by that detestable little scheming, mischief-making snake-in-the-grass.

"Oh," I sobbed, when I could find words and strength to utter them, "how *could* you leave me behind? How *could* you abandon me like that, when I was so ill and unhappy?"

"Because," said he, "you wanted to be left. You distinctly asked and were determined to be left. As for abandoning—it's I that was abandoned, it seems to me."

"You *knew* I did not want to be left," I urged—for of course he knew. "You must have seen that I only did it because I was vexed."

"And what were you vexed about?" he inquired. "I must be too dense and stupid for anything, but I'll be shot if I can understand you this time, Polly."

I told him that he was dense and stupid indeed, or he would not need to ask the question. But when I told him, further, what it was that had vexed me, he said that in some ways, when it came to denseness and stupidity, he was not a patch on me.

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Of course it was not his fault in the very least. It was all hers.

. . . . . .

P. S.—I have forgiven her now. Poor thing, it was only a manner with her; she meant no harm. I did not see it then—no one could have seen it, and I do not blame myself for being imposed on by appearances that would have deceived a very angel, which I confess I am not, though the least suspicious and uncharitable of women—but I became convinced of it afterwards.

It was when my Harry was made *dux* of his school, a year later than he would have been but for the favouritism of a master, who deliberately miscalculated examination marks. Harry, by the way, will not allow that this was the case, but that is his modesty and his feeling for the honour of the school; he does not know as much about it as I do. I was told on the best authority that he ought to have had the position, being far and away (as I well knew) the cleverest boy, and that a certain master had a "set" or "down" on him be-

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cause he had caricatured the wretch on the blackboard. It was another sixth-form fellow who said he felt sure the figures must be wrong when he heard the result.

However, there was no mistake about it this time. I, at any rate, was sure of it, when I dressed for the Speech Day function, although the names in the prize list were supposed to be unknown beforehand. Besides, I had only to look at his face, calmly elated, the eyes twinkling with suppressed excitement, to see that he had the secret—to be assured that his merits were to meet their just reward at last. But there were some mothers who allowed their mother's partiality to run away with them. I heard of two who, up to the last moment, fully expected *their* sons to come out top. And Mrs. Harris was one of these.

There was some justification for hope on her part, because young Harris was really a very industrious, plodding fellow, and had always given a good account of himself. He had not half Harry's brains, of course, but he had great application and perseverance, and

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the moral of the hare and tortoise fable is often exemplified in these cases. Especially when the hare is such an all-round genius as my boy, a prize-taker for goal-kicking, the mile handicap and the long jump, as well as for work in class. Several times I had heard Harry say, with quite a serious air, that the only one he was afraid of was Harris, and they stuck very close together through the examinations, as far as the figures were known. So when she crushed into the seat in front of me, gorgeously dressed and beaming, nodding to right and left, I saw how it was. She was prepared for any amount of envious notice and congratulation, quite thinking she was going to outshine me. I smiled—I could not help it. But I was glad afterwards that she had not seen me smile.

I was also glad that Tom had not been able to accompany us this time, though grieved for the cause—an accident to his foot while tree-chopping. Our proximity to the maker of so much trouble in the past, as to which we were still sore and reticent, might have ren-

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dered the situation uncomfortable and altered its development altogether. Harry had escorted me and his eldest sister—she a perfect dream, though I say it, in pink cambric and a white muslin hat—and had now left us to go and sit with his comrades at the back of the hall, whence a deafening noise arose continuously, most exhilarating to hear. Dear lads! I screwed my head round to look and laugh at their delightful antics, and the figure of my fine boy leading all the revelry, until Phyllis's face showed her sense of the indecorum of the proceeding. Children are so dreadfully proper where their parents are concerned, and I am always forgetting that I have to sit up and look dignified if I would have their approval and respect.

When the hall was crowded so that not another creature could squeeze into it, a fresh demonstration heralded the entrance of the headmaster, hooded and gowned, escorting the distinguished visitors, chief of whom was the Exalted Personage who had consented to distribute the prizes. They packed the daïs,

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round the book-piled table; the boys yelled and thumped the floor with their boot-heels, sung a Latin hymn with all their might, subsided with difficulty, and allowed the formal proceedings to begin. I sat in a perfect simmer of joyous excitement and expectation, fully equal to theirs, and I noticed that Mrs. Harris's face was flushed and that she kept smiling to herself in a vague way, restless and fidgety. Poor thing! Her boy was an only son, like mine, and she was one of those many love-blind mothers who mistake their geese for swans. I saw quite plainly that she had no suspicion of the truth, and was sorry for her. Some one ought to have given her a hint.

The headmaster read his annual report—every paragraph punctuated with vociferous cheers from the back benches—and the Exalted Personage made a speech, unnecessarily diffuse. Then there was a shuffling and whispering and readjustment of the blocks of books on the table, the E. P. advanced to the front of the daïs, the H. M. lined up beside him with his list, and after a few little prelimina-

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ries (the awarding of a couple of scholarships) the great moment arrived. Although I had known so certainly what would happen, when it did happen I literally jumped from my seat.

"*Dux* of School—*Henry Thomas Beauchamp Braye.*"

My heart seemed to leap into my throat, I clasped my hands, I suppose I made some exclamation unconsciously, for Phyllis plucked at my sleeve and whispered "Hush-sh!" quite fiercely. The child was not grown-up then, but still thought herself competent to teach me how to behave in public. She sat herself like any stock or stone, an image of propriety, as if it was a matter of no concern to her at all that her brother was set on the highest pinacle of honour that a schoolboy could reach.

He came striding up the hall like a young prince, with none of that shy awkwardness which made the other boys look so clumsy, and his mates cheered him to the echo as he mounted the platform to receive his load of

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prize-books and the congratulations of all the great folks. I never saw anything prettier than his quiet bows, his modest and yet dignified bearing, and his kind way with the fellows who crowded up to shake hands with him when he came down amongst them again, helping him to carry his trophies and making a regular royal progress of his return to his seat. I noticed young Harris amongst the first of these, and thought to myself that a defeated rival who could behave so nicely to the successful one must have the essential spirit of a gentleman in him. And I found it was so when I came to know him.

A little later, when the lesser prizes were being disposed of, and the interest of the proceedings was not so all-absorbing—as I just sat in placid ecstasy, thinking of nothing but my own happiness—a movement in front of me brought his poor mother to my mind. She had ceased to fidget, and I had forgotten to notice her. Now she rose slowly, in a fumbling sort of way, remarking to a lady near her that the heat of the hall was insufferable and was

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making her faint. It was very hot, and she looked faint, with all the colour gone from her cheeks and her lips twitching and trembling; but, oh, *I* knew what the trouble was! Poor, stricken soul! She felt just as I should have felt had I been in her place—just as I had felt a year ago when told that that pig-faced Middleton boy had ousted Harry—and my heart bled for her. Of course she pretended not to see me as she passed out—I should have done the same had our positions been reversed—and must have almost wanted to murder me, indeed; but—well, mothers have a fellow-feeling at these times, under all the feelings common to humanity at large. I could not resist the impulse that came to me. She had no sooner disappeared through the nearest door, seeking the fresh air for her faintness, than I, defiant of my daughter's dumb protests, got up and went out after her.

She was leaning against the grey wall, holding her handkerchief to her eyes. When she heard me she turned and glared, like a strange cat that you have penned into a corner.

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The next moment we were in each other's arms, and she was sobbing on my neck with the abandonment of a child.

And we have been the greatest friends ever since.

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CHAPTER VI.

DEPOSED.

THE little sound that is as common as silence—a familiar step, a murmured word, an opening door—one hears it a thousand times with contented indifference, as one hears the singing of the tea-kettle. But one day it falls on the heart as well as on the ear, like the stroke of a swift sword. It seems exactly the same, but one knows at once that it is not the same. In the twentieth part of a second one recognises the voice of a dire calamity—especially if one is a mother, and has heard it before.

Tom came into the house by way of the kitchen, and I heard him say to Jane, in quite a quiet tone, "Where's Mrs. Braye?" That was all. I sprang from my chair, wild with terror, dropping my needlework to the floor.

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For I knew—I knew—I didn't want to be told—that something had happened to Harry. My boy! my boy! I had been scolding him, only an hour ago, for making love to Lily's governess—a minx, whom I had just requested to find another situation—and he had slammed the door almost in my face on leaving me. I had been longing for Tom to come in, that I might tell him all about it, and have a little cry on his shoulder, and my dignity and authority in the house supported; but now that he was here my tongue was paralysed. And I had no grievance, but an immeasurable remorse.

"Don't be frightened," said my husband, trembling, in a would-be off-hand voice, "it's nothing very serious—just a bad shaking—I told him that new mare of his wasn't to be trusted, and there was a nasty stone just where she threw him. He's stunned a bit, that's all —no bones broken. I have sent for the doctor. Now look here, Polly——"

He opened his arms across the doorway, but I broke through them furiously. Did he

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remember the night when little Bobby shot himself, trying to get an opossum skin for his mother's birthday? I was not kept back then. We ran together, hand in hand, to meet our common woe, and I was first at the spot, and it was on my breast that he lay to breathe his last. Why not now, when a worse thing had befallen me? No, I don't mean that; nothing could be worse—except that every year your child is with you adds innumerable fresh strands to the rope of woven heart-strings already binding you to him, and thus makes more to bleed and ache when the wrench comes. And Harry was twenty-three—twenty-three, and over six feet, and the handsomest young fellow in the whole country! I flew full speed to find him, and see what they were doing to him. It was my mother's right, which a dozen fathers should not deprive me of.

At the garden gate I met the procession coming in. They carried him carefully on a mattress, over saplings roped together. A little rabble of people followed, one of them

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leading the fiend that had done the mischief, a vicious, half-broken, buck-jumping brute that had worried us for a long time, although Harry always trusted his own fine horsemanship to get the better of her tantrums. And rightly, too. If he had not been in a bad temper, poor darling, and doubtless running risks for the perverse satisfaction of doing so, because of the mood he was in, nothing in the shape of a horse could have thrown him. He was notoriously the best rider of the day—at any rate, of our neighbourhood.

I slammed the gate to shut out everybody, and the bearers lowered his litter, and I bent over him. He did not know me. When I leaned down to listen if he breathed, I saw a little bubble of blood oozing from his mouth; then I knew that he was more than stunned—that it was worse even than broken bones. I left off crying, and became quite calm. I had to.

We were sliding him from the mattress to his bed when Dr. Juke arrived, and he made us stop and let him do it; for, though my poor

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lad seemed unconscious, he panted and grunted in a way that showed we were hurting him, with all our care. The doctor felt and lifted his limbs, and said they were all right, and then undressed him as he lay; I got my large cutting-out scissors, and we hacked his good clothes to pieces—but that didn't matter—until we left him only his shirt and woollen singlet, and even those we cut. And just as we were finishing making him comfortable, as we hoped, he came to and looked at us. My precious boy! His breathing was short and fluttery, and he seemed too full of pain to speak, except in gasps.

"Oh, my side! my side!"

He wailed like a child—a sound to drive a mother mad.

Dr. Juke said, "Ah, I thought so." And, having made a little examination, he reported a fracture of the ribs, with some injury to the lung. He whispered something to Tom, and then told me I had better send for a trained nurse, and said it would be as well to get a

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good surgeon from town also, so as to be on the safe side.

I was willing enough to send for a dozen surgeons—though I had perfect faith in Juke, who was a clever young man, newly out from home and up to date, an enthusiast in his profession—but I could not bear the thought of a professional nurse. I knew those women—how they take possession of your nearest and dearest, and treat even an old mother as if she were a mere outsider and an utter ignoramus. I protested that I could do all that was necessary—that no one could possibly take the care of him that I should. Was it likely?

"But he will probably want nursing all day and all night for weeks," said Dr. Juke. "You could not do that unaided. You would break down, and then where would he be?"

"I will telegraph for my daughter," I rejoined. Phyllis was away at the time, visiting.

"Miss Braye is too young and inexperienced," he objected, with the airs of a grandfather. "It would not be fair to her. She

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is better where she is, out of all the trouble. However, there is no need to decide immediately. We'll see the night through first. All we can do for the present is to make him as easy as possible and watch symptoms. The *most* important thing is not to meddle with him."

This seemed a hard saying, and at first I could not credit it. It was terrible to see nothing done, when he evidently suffered so—more and more as the first shock passed and the dreadful fever rose and rose; but while the lung was letting blood and air into the cavity of the chest, which could not be reached to stop the leak, handling of any sort only aggravated the mischief. The doctor explained this to me when I was impatient, and I had to own that he was probably right. He asked me to see about drinks and nourishment, and when I left the room to do so I had a mind to seize the opportunity for a few frantic tears in private, impelled by the pent-up anguish I could not otherwise relieve.

But outside the door—Harry's door—I

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came upon Miss Blount. The little fool was crying herself—as if it were any concern of hers!—and looked a perfect sight with her swelled nose and sodden cheeks. Somehow I couldn't stand it, on the top of all the rest—I just took her by the arm and marched her back to the schoolroom. I hope I was not rough or unkind—I really don't think I was—but to see her you would have thought she was a ridiculous little martyr being led to the stake. I said to her—quite quietly, without making any fuss—"My dear, while you remain in this house—until the notice I have been compelled by our contract to give you has expired—oblige me by keeping in your proper place and confining your attention to your proper business."

Just as if I had not spoken—and I am sure she never heard a word—she turned on me at the schoolroom door and clutched at my dress. With both hands she held on to me, so that I really could not get away from her.

"Oh, tell me, tell me," she cried, with a lackadaisical whine, as if we were playing

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melodrama at a cheap theatre, "*What* does the doctor say? Is he, oh, *is* he going to die?"

I replied—cuttingly, I am afraid—that the doctor seemed perfectly well. There was no sign of dying, that I could see, about him.

Then she said "Harry!" Yes, to my very face! As if she had a right to call my son by his christian name. I was greatly exasperated; any mother would have been—especially after what had happened.

I answered, "*Mr.* Harry *is* going to die—*thanks to you,* Miss Blount."

I truly believed that he was, and I honestly thought that it was her doing; because if she had not misconducted herself, and tempted him to do so, I should not have had to scold him, and he would not have gone out in a rage, to ride a young horse recklessly. Still, it has occurred to me since that perhaps I was not quite just to her, poor thing.

Oh, what a night that was! Temperature 103°, and a short, agonising cough catch-

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ing the hurt side, which he was obliged to lie on, because the other lung had to do the work of both. We padded him with the softest pillows in the house, and tried ice, and sedatives —everything we could think of; but we could not soothe the struggling chest, which was the only way to stop the inward bleeding. And he kept up a sort of grinding moan, like a long "u" in French—worse than shrieks. It was too, too cruel! I wonder my hair did not turn white.

Next day we got the surgeon from town; the day after, the nurse. But I came to an understanding with her before she set foot in Harry's room. I bade her remember that he was my son, and that a mother could not consent to be superseded. She asked if she were to be allowed to carry out the doctor's orders, and when I said "Yes, of course," she seemed satisfied. She was a good creature. After all, I don't know what we should have done without her. There is a limit to one's strength, and though Phyllis was a great help outside the sick-room, we did not think it right—Dr.

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Juke did not think it right—to let her be much in it.

She came home as soon as she heard what had happened, in spite of his advice. I went downstairs one day, and found her sitting in the deserted drawing-room, with her hat on, talking to him; I thought he had gone an hour ago, but he had seen her arriving, and stayed to break things to her and give her all the particulars, before she met the rest of us. He was somewhat inclined to be officious, though he meant well.

I exclaimed in astonishment at the sight of her.

"It was no good, mother; I had to come," said she, rising quickly and taking out her hat-pins. "And I did not warn you, for fear you should prevent me. Don't scold me—Dr. Juke doesn't. I want to help, and he says I can be a lot of use."

"Invaluable," said Juke, in a young man's gushing manner. "It was only for your own sake, Miss Phyllis, that I wished you out of it."

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She is not Miss Phyllis, by the way, but Miss Braye.

"I mean to be everybody's right hand," she continued, trying to cheer me. "We are not going to let you kill yourself any more, mother dear. And we are not going to let Harry die, either—are we, Dr. Juke?"

"No, no," replied the doctor, with an exaggerated air of reassuring me, as if pacifying a timid child. "We'll pull him through amongst us. The sight of your face"—it was not my face he meant—"will be the best medicine he can have. Only, remember, you must not talk to him."

"I know—I know. You will find that I shall be discretion itself."

She was quite gay. I could see that she did not yet realise the situation, poor child, whatever Juke had told her about it. But when I took her upstairs, and showed her the changed face in the sick-room, she was shocked enough. She and her brother were devoted to each other. They used to go to their little parties and entertainments to-

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gether, and everybody used to remark upon their looks and say what a handsome pair they made. He thought—that is, he used to think, before other girls spoiled him—that there was no one like his sister Phyllis, and she thought the same of him. Nevertheless, when I told her of his conduct with Miss Blount, she was quite indignant. She said she would never have believed it of him. At the same time she was firmly convinced, as I was, that Miss Blount had done the love-making and led him on. What a comfort it was to have my dear girl to talk to and confide in! She was not only a lovely young creature—though I say it—but had the sense of an old woman. Lily was quite different. But then Lily was a child—barely seventeen—and she had an absurd infatuation for her governess, such as you often see in a raw schoolgirl. It was a stupid mistake on my part to engage a person of twenty-two to teach her—I saw it now; and I think it a still greater mistake to confer University degrees on such young women. You seem to expect them to be above the im-

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becilities of ordinary girls, and they are not a bit.

Well, we shut them up together in a separate part of the house, giving them their meals in the schoolroom. We did not want Lily to be losing the education we were paying so much for, and Tom and I just took our food as we could get it. We had no heart to sit down to table. Sometimes he slept for a little, and sometimes I, but one or the other of us was always on guard; while Phyllis prepared the iced milk and soda, and waited on the nurse and doctor. Certainly the doctor was most devoted; he could not have done more for his patient if he had been his own brother.

I am sure it was the opinion of his medical colleague that Harry could never pull through. He said, in so many words, that the case was as grave as possible, owing chiefly, as I understood, to the accumulation of fluid in the chest, which could not be mechanically dealt with. Nevertheless, the dear boy rallied a little, and then a little more—the fever keeping down in the daytime, and not running quite so high

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at night—until it really seemed that we might begin to hope. He was such a splendid young fellow, and had such a magnificent constitution! But for that I am convinced he could not have survived an hour. One afternoon he was sleeping so comfortably that they all insisted on my going out for some fresh air. Tom took me for a walk round the garden, and we planned what we would do for our beloved one when he got well—how we would go for a little travel to amuse and cheer him, to recruit his strength and distract his mind from nonsense.

When I returned, I found that he had awakened from his sleep, calm and refreshed; that he had asked to see his sister Lily, and—that that fool of a nurse had allowed it! Oh, I could have shaken her! As it was, I gave her a talking to that she sulked over for a week. Lily, she said, had only remained with him ten minutes—as if one minute wouldn't have been enough to undo all our work! *Idiot!* And to call herself a trained nurse, too!

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As soon as I approached his bed I saw the difference. Not only had he been doing so well, he had been so nice to me, so loving and gentle, as if feeling that all was right between us. Now he was flushed—I knew his temperature had gone up again—and he looked at me as if I were his enemy instead of his mother.

"Is it true," he said, "that you have given Miss Blount notice?"

I did not know what to say. Seeing the absolute necessity for keeping him quiet, I tried to put the question aside. But he would have an answer.

"Dearest," I pleaded, "I am doing for the best. And you will be the first to acknowledge it when you are yourself again. It is for her sake," I added, though I'm sure I don't know why I said that.

He continued to look at me as if I were a graven image, insensible to the tears that filled my eyes. And he looked *so* handsome—even in this wreck of health—a fit husband for a queen.

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"Mother," he said, in a stern way, "if you do a thing so unjust as that I will never forgive you."

Ah, Harry! Harry! And after all I had done for him—slaving night and day! After all the love and care, the heart's blood, that I had lavished on him for nearly twenty-four years!

"Unjust!" I repeated, cut to the quick. "My boy, I may have my faults—I daresay I have—nobody is perfect in this world; but my worst enemy cannot lay it to my charge that I have ever committed an injustice."

He smiled, but it was a hard smile. And the nurse came up, as bold as you please, to tell me I must be silent, as I was exciting him. *I* exciting him! It was then I gave her that talking to.

Well, he had been getting on as satisfactorily as possible up to this point. But now, of course, he went back. His temperature was 104° in the night, and he complained of pains and uneasiness, and turned against his nourish-

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ment, light and liquid as it was. When he did get a snatch of sleep, his breathing was as restless as possible. Sometimes it went fast, and sometimes it seemed to stop, and then he would suddenly give a deep snore, and a jump that hurt his side and roused him. After which he would lie still a little while, staring at the wall. His eyes were full of fever, and presently he began to talk, and we could not make out what he was saying, except that little huzzy's name—Emily. He kept saying "Emily"—no, "Emmie"—as if he thought she was in the same room. Once I fancied he called me, and when I went to him he put up his poor hands—already so thin and bleached! —and I thought he wanted to be forgiven and be friends with his mother again. But, just as I was dropping on my knees beside him to take him into my arms, he said, "Kiss me, Emmie." And, oh, in such a voice! It made me feel—but I can't describe how it made me feel.

And next day he had a shivering fit, and the day after another, with more fever than

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ever when they had passed off—a thirst like fire, and pain in breathing, and delirium, and everything that was bad and hopeless. Dr. Juke said it meant blood-poisoning, and that he had expected it from the first; but I did not believe it. For was he not doing beautifully up to the moment when Lily was allowed to see him and upset him with her tales? This time we sent for two doctors from Melbourne, and they and Juke were closeted together for an hour after making their examination; and, when they came out at last, they said they were agreed that our boy was in so desperate a state that nothing short of a miracle could save him.

I called the girls into my room to break it to them, and we sat on the sofa at the foot of my bed and had our cry together. I was completely broken down. So was poor Lily. She sobbed so violently that I was afraid Harry would hear her. Phyllis was more composed —she always was—and refused to despair as long as life was in him. She professed contempt for the great doctors, and pinned her

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faith to Juke. Juke had told her that miracles, in his profession, were constantly happening, and that for his part he did not mean to give up the fight until all was over.

"I believe, mother," said my brave girl, "that he will succeed, after all, in spite of those old fogies. He knows a lot more than they do, and he says there's no calculating the power of youth and a sound constitution in these cases. He says——"

But I was too wretched to listen to her. They were not old fogies to me—those two experienced men—and a young doctor is but a young doctor, however clever; I found it impossible to hope at this juncture. Lily was kneeling by me with her arms round my waist, quite hysterical with grief; and for the moment I felt that she was more in sympathy with me than her sister. I realised my mistake when the child suddenly sprang to her feet, hitting my chin with her head as she did so, and declared that she must go to "poor Miss Blount."

"Lily," I cried, as she was flinging out of

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the room in her impetuous fashion, "what are strangers at such a time as this?"

"Nothing," said Lily, in a brazen way—she would never have spoken to her mother in that tone if she had not been encouraged; "but Miss Blount is not a stranger. She loves Harry, and Harry loves her, and she's broken-hearted, and she's ill, and she's nearly out of her mind, and nobody ever says a kind word to her! Even now that he's dying, and they can't have each other, you treat her as if she were dirt. Poor, poor Emily! Let me go to her! Now that Harry's dying, she's got nobody—not a soul in this house—but me!"

Well, indeed! Who'd be a mother, if she could foresee what would come of it? To have this blow, on the top of all the rest, and at *such* a moment! I felt quite stunned. At first I could only stare at her—I could not speak; then I said, "Go, go!" and pointed to the door. For I could bear no more.

As soon as she was gone, I turned to my faithful Phyllis, put my head on her shoulder, and sobbed like a baby.

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"Oh, Phyllis," I cried, "never you get married, my dear! Never you have children, to suffer through them as I suffer!"

She was wiser than I, however. She said she didn't think it was altogether the children's fault.

I admitted it at once. "You are quite right," I said, "and I was wrong. It is not the children's fault. It's the fault of that hateful creature, who has set them both against me. First Harry, then Lily—the very one she was hired to teach her duty to! Fancy a governess, calling herself a governess, and a B. A. to boot, corrupting an innocent young girl, a mere child, with all the details of a clandestine love intrigue! What infamy! What treachery!" I was beside myself when I thought of it. Any mother would have been.

But Phyllis was not a mother, and she was but lukewarm in this matter upon which I felt so strongly. Indeed, I was half inclined to fear that she, too, had become infected by the evil influence amongst us, until I found

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that it was Dr. Juke who had been putting ideas into her head. Dr. Juke was undoubtedly very clever, and we were enormously indebted to him; still, I have always felt that he was too fond of giving his opinion upon things that were altogether outside his province. It appeared he had been telling Phyllis that it was very bad for Harry to have any trouble on his mind, and that it was absolutely necessary, if we would give him his full chances of recovery, to remove any that we knew of which could be removed.

"After all," said Phyllis, in a tone that showed how he had talked her over, "she's a ladylike person enough, and certainly a clever one."

"Clever, indeed," I retorted, "to have caught a man like him! And looking all the while as demure and innocent as a nun—as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth! Oh, Phyllis, it would blight his career for ever."

"Perhaps not," she rejoined tolerantly—for she was too young to know; "but even

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so, I would rather have him blight his career than die."

"You speak," I cried—"you actually speak as if *I* wanted him to die!"

Here Tom came in, and when she saw her father she got up to leave us together. I was glad indeed to have him to myself for a few minutes. We, at any rate, understood each other. He has his faults, dear fellow, and I often get impatient with him; but he loves me—he thinks the world of me—he doesn't question my judgment and criticise my conduct, as the children do. I was going to tell him about Lily, and about what Juke had said to Phyllis; but when he took me into his great, strong, kind arms, I was too overcome to utter a word. I could do nothing but weep. Nor could he. We thought how we had toiled and slaved to make our precious boy the man he was—how we had nursed him through his baby illnesses, and pinched ourselves to send him to public school and University, and been so proud of his beauty and his talents and his achievements, and looked forward with such

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joy to the name he would make in the world; and how we were to lose him after all, just as we were looking for the reward of our love and labours—and in this truly awful way!

Tom said it was quite certain now that he would die. Blood-poisoning had set in; there were swellings in some muscles of his body to prove it—a fatal symptom, as every one knew. It only needed to spread to an internal organ, and the machine would stop at once.

"And the sooner it's over, the better," groaned Tom, "and the poor chap's sufferings at an end. Ah, Polly, old girl, little we thought of this when he was born, and we were as vain as two peacocks over him! Do you remember how you brought him up to Sydney, because you couldn't wait till I got home—and we had him on the bridge at night when the passengers were a-bed below——"

"Oh, don't!" I wailed in agony. Remember it! Did I not remember it? And a hundred thousand heart-breaking things.

But we had to compose ourselves as best we could, and go back to our dreadful duties;

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he to see that the doctors had a proper lunch before they left, I to renew my watch in the sick-room—to see the last, as I supposed, of my dying boy.

On my way I came upon Jane hurrying along the passage with a basin of hot broth. Harry was not allowed animal food, so I stopped her to ask what she was doing with it.

"Taking it to Miss Blount," she replied; and I fancied she did not speak quite so respectfully as usual. "That poor young lady hardly touches her meals, and it do go to my heart to see her look so ill. I thought perhaps a drop of good soup 'd tempt her."

Now I did not want to get the character—which I am the last person to deserve—of being a hard woman. I am not one of those low creatures that one reads of in novels who don't know how to treat a governess properly. To me Miss Blount was as much a lady as I was myself, and I had always made a point of considering her in anything. Besides, it was not the time for animosities. All was changed in view of Harry's approaching death. She

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could not injure him any more. So I took the little tray from Jane, and said to her, "Go back to your kitchen, and attend to the doctors' lunch. I will take the broth to Miss Blount, and find out what is the matter with her."

The girl was in her bedroom. When she saw me she jumped up, as scared as if I had been an ogress come to eat her; but when I first opened the door she was kneeling against her bed, as if saying her prayers. Certainly, she did look ill. She had had a very nice complexion—no doubt poor Harry had noticed it—and her eyes were good; but now her skin was like tallow, and her eyes all dark and washed out, and they had a curious empty expression in them that I did not like at all. I put the tray on the drawers and went up to her, and laid my hand on her shoulder. "My dear," I said, as kindly as I could speak, "I have brought you a little nourishing broth, that I think will do you good. And you must take it at once, while it is hot, to please me."

She did not so much as say thank you, but

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just stood and stared in a dazed, fixed way, like a deaf mute. So, naturally, I did not feel inclined to bother myself further about her, and I turned to go. As soon as I did that, however, she spoke to me, calling my name. Her voice had a sort of lost sound in it, as if she were talking in her sleep.

"Mrs. Braye," she said, "there's something I have been wanting to say to you."

"What is it?" I inquired.

"If Mr. Harry gets well, I will not marry him—to blight his career. I never would have injured him, and I never will. I would die sooner."

Well, it seemed rather late to think of that. Still, it showed a nice spirit, and I liked the way she spoke of him. She really was a lady, in her way, and—poor thing!—she did look the picture of misery. I am a tender-hearted woman, and I could not but feel a pang of pity for her.

"Ah, my dear," I said, "there's no question of marrying or not now! He is going fast, and nothing matters any more."

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Then I kissed her—I kissed her affectionately—and bade her lie down, and not trouble about Lily's lessons; and I told her that whenever there was a change in Harry's condition I would let her know.

The change came a few days later—not suddenly, but creeping inch by inch; and it was not the change we had all anticipated. My splendid boy! Just as he had struggled and triumphed at football and cricket, so his magnificent strength fought with and overcame the poison in his blood before it could deposit itself in vital organs. It was marvellous. The very doctors, accustomed to miracles, could not believe their senses when they counted his pulse and looked at the little thermometer, and felt the places where the sore lumps had been. For weeks, I may say, we seemed to hold our breath in the maddening suspense, tantalised and intoxicated with a hope we dared not call a certainty; but at last we knew that life had conquered death, and that I was not called upon to undergo *this* agony of motherhood a second time.

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Of course he was weaker than a new-born baby—a mere shadow of himself; but he was saved. When they told me, I fell on my knees, just where I stood, and cried in my wild rapture and thankfulness, "Oh, God! God! What can I do—what uttermost service or sacrifice can I offer—for all Thy goodness to me?"

They looked at me in an odd way. They all looked at me, even my boy with his hollow eyes. And Tom said, "Come here, Polly, I want to speak to you;" and took me into our room, and laid his hand on my shoulders. He stood six feet in his socks, and weighed sixteen stone, but he trembled like a child.

"Old girl," he said, "you'll have to let him have her."

"Oh," I replied, "if he wants the moon, give it to him! I don't care."

It was a figurative way of expressing my mood of joy—my longing to compensate him utterly for what he had gone through; and I don't think I ought to have been taken so literally. But, before the words were well

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out of my mouth, Tom made off to Harry's room, and there and then informed him that "mother had given her consent."

And he did not tell me he was going to catch me up in this way. When next I went to my boy's bedside, and he murmured, "Good old mummy!" and remarked, with that deep thrill in his voice, that it was worth while getting well, I thought he meant that it was worth while getting well to see us all so happy.

"Ay," I said, from my heart, "if you hadn't got well, it's little that would have been worth while to *me* any more."

"Poor old mummy!" he ejaculated. And then, turning serious eyes upon my face, "You will never regret it. I can answer for that."

"You need not waste breath to tell me what I know better than I know anything," I responded, smiling.

"I mean," he said, still seriously, "about *her*."

Then I understood why he had said it was

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worth while to get well. She was of more consequence to him than all his own people put together.

"Her?" I queried, smoothing his hair—not letting him guess the pang I felt.

"Miss Blount. Father says you have been so good to us—that you have given us leave—that it's all right now. Look here, mother, if you only knew her——"

I stopped him, for he was getting agitated.

"If your heart is set on it, darling—by and by, I mean, when you are quite well, and have thoroughly considered the matter—don't imagine *I* shall be the one to disappoint you and make you unhappy. I never have been a cruel mother, have I? And as for knowing Miss Blount, if I don't know her, having her constantly in the house with me, who should? Don't worry yourself about Miss Blounts or anything else till you are stronger, dearest. Put everything out of your head—think of nothing whatever—except getting well. And when you are quite well—then we'll see."

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"I can't put her out of my head. I want to see her, mother."

"So you shall, dear—as soon as you are fit to see people. I will ask the doctor about it."

"Juke wouldn't object; he'd be glad. Oh, mother——!"

The nurse came up, and said she thought he had talked enough. I thought so too. His thin cheek was flushed, and his lip trembled; he was inclined to excite himself, and had not strength to spare for that just yet. I gave him his nourishment, turned his pillow, and whispered to him that, if he would sleep for a few hours, then he should have his wish.

"Honour bright?" he whispered back.

"Don't insult me," I retorted. "When did you ever know me to break a promise?"

"To-day, mother?"

"To-day—if Dr. Juke approves. Of course we must have doctor's express permission."

"All right. Give me a squirt of morphia, nurse."

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"No, Master Harry. No more morphia, my dear—except maybe a time or two at night, when you *can't* do without it."

"I can't do without it now," he said. "I've got to sleep before I can see her, and I can't sleep, of myself, until I do see her."

"There," I exclaimed, flinging out a hand. "What did I say? I *knew* what the effect would be."

The woman—who, I found, was actually privy to the whole affair—Tom's doing, no doubt—began to give her opinion, as is the way of those nurses. "If you'll take my advice," said she, "you'll let him see her now, and sleep afterwards. It'll tire him less than fretting for her."

"And if you will be so good as to mind your own business," I replied, quietly but firmly, "I shall be infinitely obliged to you."

I had not been out of the room five minutes before Tom came to seek me, looking quite hoity-toity, as if he thought himself aboard ship again, with sailors.

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"Now then, Polly," he said, "I'm not going to have any more nonsense about this. The boy is too weak to be worried. I am going to fetch Emily."

"Since when," I asked, "has it been your habit to call her Emily?"

He stared, and looked confused. "I suppose," he said, "I've caught it from Harry."

"Talking with him so much about her, when it was so necessary to keep him calm? And to that nurse woman, behind my back—as if the private concerns of our family were any concern of servants! Tom, I didn't think *you* would ever be disloyal to me."

"I don't think I ever have been, Polly. What's more, I don't think you would ever imagine such a thing in cool blood. Come, you are not going to spoil this happy day for us all, are you? The boy has been given back to us by a miracle——"

That was enough. I flung myself into his arms.

"Forgive me! Forgive me!" I cried.

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"I know it is wicked of me. But you don't *know* how I feel it, Tom!"

"Yes, I do, pet; I know exactly."

"No one but a mother *can* know. I used to be everything to him once, and now he is only glad to get well because of her!"

"Well, it's natural. We——"

"No, we didn't. We had no mothers. But never mind—I won't be selfish. I will go and fetch her at once."

"Would you rather I went?"

"*Certainly* not! Do you suppose I want them to go on thinking that you are their only friend, and I their implacable enemy? *I* want to make him happy as much as ever you can do."

"That's right, old girl. If you're going to do a kind thing, do it the kindest way you know. They'll be just fit to worship you, both of 'em."

I did not ask to be worshipped, but I did want my boy to love his mother a little. I ran to him, brushing the nurse aside.

"Dearest," I whispered, "I am going to

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bring Emily. She shall sit with you as long and as often as you like. She shall be your wife, if you want her. I will make a daughter of her—for your sake."

I took the kiss I had so richly earned, and hurried to the schoolroom. There sat Miss Blount, still faded and tearful, but beaming with the joy that filled the house, like the sun through rain. She and Lily had been crying and rejoicing together, congratulating one another. I waved the child aside, and, taking her governess by the hand, with a "Come, dear," which I could see explained everything in a moment, led her into Harry's room.

After all, she was a lady, and a B. A. He might have done worse. But when I saw the look he turned to her when she ran like a deer to his arms—poor sticks of arms!—and how he held her, and crooned over her—oh, it was like a dagger in my breast!

Tom took me away, and tried to comfort me. He reminded me that we did the same ourselves when we were young, and that we still had each other.

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"You've still got me, Polly. *I* sha'n't desert you."

Yes, yes; of course I still had him. But——

Well, a *man* can't understand.

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CHAPTER VII.

A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT.

A BOY who is not yet twenty-four, and who has nothing beyond his salary as a clerk in a shipping office, and whose young lady is a pauper, can get engaged if he likes; but he cannot get married. I pointed this out to Harry as soon as he was well enough to be reasoned with. I said to him, "You know, my dearest, that there's nothing in the world I would not do to make you happy, but it would not be making you happy to let you think for a moment of such madness." It appeared, from Tom's account, that the child had been thinking of it—doubtless at Emily's instigation. "I might as well encourage you to cut your throat. Far better, indeed."

"Better?" he echoed, lifting his eyebrows, and smiling in that queer way of his.

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"Better!" I insisted firmly. "You little know what it means—that rushing into irrevocable matrimony without counting the cost—without knowing what it entails—without experience or means——"

"Mother," he interrupted, still smiling—a little impudently, though I don't think he meant to be rude—"you were not any more experienced than we are, and not any older or richer, were you?"

I replied with dignity that my case was nowise in point. He wanted to know why it was not. I said, because I—unlike him—had been practically homeless at the time. And he cried, "*Were* you? I never heard of that!" and stared at me in such a way that I blushed hotly, though old enough to know better. He was an obstinate fellow, and he corresponded with his grandfather and young uncles and aunts in England, and had a heap of their autographed photos in his room. I thought I had better turn him over to his father.

Tom was walking in the garden with Em-

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ily, who had managed to get around him in that innocent-seeming way of hers—well, I must not be uncharitable; I daresay it *was* innocent, and I could almost have fancied that they did not care about being interrupted. Only, of course, that's nonsense.

"My dear," I said, in a sprightly voice, "your young man seems to find his mother a bore these days, and it's only natural. I have been trying to cheer him, and he responds by yawning in my face. Pray do go and exercise your spells, which are so much more potent, and leave me my old man, who is still my own."

Was there any harm in a little light chaff of this kind? One would surely think not. But Tom, standing and looking after her as she slipped away, blushing in her ready, *ingénue* fashion—so unlike a B. A.—said, quite gravely—

"That's a dear little soul, Polly! And I wouldn't speak to her in just that sort of a way, if I were you. It hurts her."

"It hurts *me*," I returned, "when *you*

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speak in that sort of a way. It is most unjust. Can't you take a joke? You know perfectly well that I treat her with the utmost kindness and consideration—that I have accepted her unreservedly, for my boy's sake."

"Well, well," said he, "I know you don't mean it. Your bark's worse than your bite, old girl. Come and look at the new pigs."

He drew my hand under his arm and patted it. We had had so many little tiffs lately—things we never dreamt of till Miss Blount came!—that I was determined not to quarrel now. It should never be said that *I* was to blame for making a happy home unhappy. I swallowed my vexation and went to see the pigs—thirteen little black Berkshires, all as lively as they could be, on which he gloated whole-heartedly for the moment, as if they were more than wife or children. In his expansive ardour he offered me one of them to make a festive dish of for Sunday.

"Let us have a little feast, Polly, for the young folks. Harry is able to sit up to table now, and we have done nothing to celebrate

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the engagement yet. Sucking-pig and one of the fat turkeys, and ask Juke to join us. Eh?"

"My dear," I replied, "I am perfectly willing to celebrate the engagement in any way you like—yes, we'll have a nice dinner, and ask Dr. Juke—I am sure we owe him every attention that we can possibly pay him; but what I want to warn you against is letting them suppose that there is to be any celebration of the marriage—with our consent."

Tom stared as if he did not understand.

"You mean, not immediately?" he questioned. "Of course not."

"I mean, not for *years*," I solemnly urged. "Tom, you must back me up in this. The boy is but a boy, with his way to make in the world. Before we allow him to saddle himself with a wife who will probably be quite useless—those University women always are—and the responsibilities of a family, he *must* be in a position to afford it."

"Yes," said Tom, in a tepid way. "But you and I, Polly——"

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"Oh, never mind about you and me," I broke in; "that is altogether different"—for of course it was. "You were a man of twice his age."

"Which would make him about fourteen," said my husband, trying to be funny.

As for me, I saw nothing to laugh at. I cannot imagine a more serious position as between parent and child. "At his time of life," I said, "four years are equal to ten at any other stage. Let him have those four years—let him begin where his father did—and I shall be quite satisfied."

"Well, you see, my dear, it hardly rests with us, does it?"

Tom stirred up the mother sow with his walking-stick, and sniggered in a most feeble-minded fashion.

"How? Why not?" I demanded. "Do you mean to say you have not the power to influence him? Do you think that Harry, if properly advised, would persist in taking his own way in spite of us? I refuse to believe that any son of *mine* could do such a thing."

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Again Tom laughed, looking at me as if he saw some great joke somewhere. I asked him what it was, and he said, "Oh, never mind—nothing." But I knew. He was thinking of my own elopement, to which I was driven by my father's second marriage—an incident that had no bearing whatever upon the present case. It exasperated me to see him so flippant about a matter of really grave importance, but I determined not to let him draw me into a dispute.

"Four years," I said mildly, "would give them time to know each other and their own minds. It would be a test, to prove them. If at the end of four years they were still faithful, I should feel assured that all was well. But of course they would get tired of each other long before that, and so he would be spared a terrible fate, and all the trouble would be at an end."

We had left the pigsty and were pacing the paths of the kitchen garden, surveying the depredations of the irrepressible slug.

"The rain seems to wash the soot away as

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fast as I put it on," sighed Tom. "I'll get a bag of lime, and try what that'll do. Well, Polly, for my part, I should be very sorry to think them likely to get tired of each other. And I don't believe it, either. I don't think she's that sort of a girl somehow."

"How like a man!" I ejaculated. "Just because she's got a pretty face!"

"No, not because she's got a pretty face —though it is a pretty face—but because she's good as well as pretty. She's a right down good girl, my dear, believe me—just the sort of daughter-in-law I'd have chosen for myself, if I had had the choosing. I told Harry so. You should have seen how pleased he was!"

"No doubt. But I don't see how you can know whether she's good or not. *You* are not always with her, as we are."

"Oh, I see her at times. We have little talks occasionally. A man can soon tell." He put his arm round my waist as we paced along. "I haven't been married to you for all these years without knowing a good woman from a bad one, Polly."

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It was intended for a compliment, but somehow I could not smile at it. In fact, I shed a tear instead. And when he saw it, and stooped to kiss it away, my feelings overcame me. I threw my arms round his neck and begged him not to let fascinating daughters-in-law draw away his heart from his old wife. I daresay it was silly, but I could not help it. Of course he chuckled as if I had said something very funny. And his only reply was "*Baby!*"—in italics. So like a man, who never can see a meaning that is not right on the top of a word.

However, I promised to be nice to Emily —nicer, rather, for, as I told him, I had always been nice to her—and he said he would take an early opportunity to have a serious talk with Harry.

"But let the poor chap alone till he gets his strength again," he pleaded—as if I were a perfect tyrant, bent on making the boy miserable; "let the poor children enjoy their love-making for the little while that Emily remains here. She has been telling me that she's got

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a fine appointment in a school—joint principal —and that she's going to work in a fortnight —to work and save for their little home, till Harry is ready for her."

"*What?*" I exclaimed. "She never told me that."

"She will, of course, when you give her the chance," said Tom, with an air of apology.

"She ought to have told me, she ought to have confided in me, first of all," I urged, much hurt, as I had every right to be; "I can't understand why she did not. You seem," I concluded passionately—"you all seem to be having secrets behind my back, and shutting me out of everything, as if I were everybody's enemy. It is always so!"

"It is never so," replied Tom, laying his arm round my shoulder. "You are never outside, old girl, except when you won't come in."

That was what they always said when they wanted to defend themselves.

But here we dropped the painful subject,

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and discussed the details of our proposed festival.

"Only Juke?" I inquired, counting on my fingers. "That makes seven in all—an awkward number."

"No matter for a family party," said Tom. "We are not going in for style this time. The boy in his armchair and pillows will take the room of two."

"Still, we may as well make it an even eight," I urged. "Otherwise the table will look lopsided, and one or other of the girls will have nobody to talk to."

"They will be quite satisfied to have their brother to look at. No, no, Polly, don't let us make a company affair of it, for goodness' sake. Harry wouldn't like it, or be fit for it either."

"And isn't Juke company?"

"By Heavens, no! We owe it to that young fellow that our only son isn't in his grave—yes, Polly, I am convinced of it—and my house is his, and all that's in it. Besides, he'll be here professionally—to see that Harry

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doesn't overeat himself. Oh, Juke is quite another pair of shoes."

I certainly did not see it. He had served us well, no doubt, and we had paid him well; each side had done its part in a generous and conscientious spirit. I considered he had no more claim on us now than the thousands of passengers Tom had carried when he was a sea captain had on him. I am sure no doctor in the world can match a ship's commander of the most common type for self-denying devotion to the cause of duty. But, seeing Tom so inclined to be cross and unreasonable, I thought it better to say no more. We returned to the sty to select the piglet that was to be killed, and in my own mind I selected the guest who should make the table symmetrical. I knew that Harry would only rejoice to see another friend, and it was due to Phyllis to provide her as well as the others with a companion. It was also an opportunity which I did not feel it right to miss for serving her interests in other ways.

I am not one of those vulgar match-makers

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who are the laughing-stock of the young men, and properly so—quite the contrary, indeed: no one can accuse *me* of scheming to get my daughters married. Still, they must be married some day—or should be, in the order of nature—and surely to goodness a mother is permitted to safeguard, to some extent, a thoughtless and ignorant girl against the greatest of all the perils that her inexperience of life can expose her to. Not for the world would I force her inclination in any way, but there is a difference between doing that and letting her make a fool of herself with the first casual puppy in coat and trousers that crosses her path. The duty of parents is to protect their adolescent children from themselves, as it were, in this incalculably important matter; that is to say, to keep their path clear of acquaintanceships from which undesirable complications might result, while encouraging innocent friendships that may develop with impunity. Otherwise, what's the use of being parents at all? Your children might as well be orphans, and better. I neglected this

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duty, certainly, when I allowed Harry and Emily Blount to have access to each other; but then a son is not like a daughter—you can't be always overlooking him—and that affair was a lesson to me. I determined to be more vigilant in Phyllis's case.

Phyllis is not like other girls. I think I may say, without a particle of vanity, that she is the very prettiest in Australia, at the least. There may be greater beauties at home—I don't know, it is so long since I was there; but if there be, I should like to see them. Her features are not classical, of course, and that dear little piquant suggestion of a cast in the left eye is a peculiarity, though it is not a defect, any more than are the freckles she gets in summer: these trifles of detail merely go to make the *tout-ensemble* what it is—so charming that she has but to enter a room to eclipse every other woman in it. This being so, I was naturally anxious that she should marry, when she did marry, into her proper sphere, and not be thrown away upon a man unworthy of her. And I only took the most

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simple and necessary precaution for her safety when I limited my invitations to young fellows whom I could trust—like Spencer Gale.

Tom says I never had a good word for Spencer Gale until he made his fortune in Broken Hills. It amuses Tom to make these reckless statements, and it doesn't hurt me in the least. I *always* liked the boy, but any fair-minded person must have acknowledged that his change of circumstances had improved him—brushed him up, and brightened him in every way. It was not his wealth that induced me to throw him into my daughter's company, but his sterling personal qualities. A better son never walked, excepting my own dear Harry—that alone was enough for me; a good son never fails to make a good husband, as everybody knows.

His sister was a friend and neighbour of mine, and I knew that he was staying with her. At one time all the family had lived here, Mr. Gale having Tom's fancy for amateur farming and market-gardening in his leisure hours. Spencer and Harry, both be-

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ing clerks in Melbourne offices, used to go into town together of a morning; that was how we came to know them. But when Spencer had some shares given him which went to a ridiculous price directly afterwards, and when his money, by all sorts of lucky chances, bred money at such a rate that he was worth (they said) a quarter of a million in a twelvemonth, then they all left this out-of-the-way suburb for a big place in Toorak—all except Mary Gale, who married a poor clergyman before the boom. Mary's husband, Mr. Welshman, was the incumbent of our parish, and her good brother was not at all too grand to pay her visits at intervals, besides helping her to educate the children. Which proved conclusively that prosperity had not spoiled him.

I walked to the parsonage on Friday afternoon, hoping to find him there; but he was out, and I only saw Mrs. Welshman. I used to like Mary Welshman in the old days, but she has become quite spoiled since people began to make a fuss of her family on Spencer's account. It is always the case—I have no-

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ticed it repeatedly; when sudden wealth comes to those who have not been accustomed to it, it is the girls whose heads are turned. I asked for Spencer, and mentioned that we wished him to dine with us, and you would have thought I was seeking an audience with a king from his lord chamberlain.

"Oh, I don't know, I'm sure," she said, with her absurd airs of importance. "He is so much in request everywhere. He is certain to have a dozen engagements. I don't think you have the remotest chance of getting him, Mrs. Braye, on such short notice."

The fact was that she did not want me to get him. She had the fixed delusion—all the Gales had—that there wasn't a mother or daughter in the country who was not plotting to catch him for matrimonial purposes; and she let me see very plainly her suspicion of my motives and her fear of Phyllis's power.

"To-night," she exclaimed, in a tone of triumph—"to-night he is dining at the Melbourne Club, to meet the Governor." Poor thing! It was amusing to see how proud she

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was of it—evidently bursting to proclaim the news to all and sundry.

"Very well," I said, smiling, "I will just drop a note to him at the club."

And then I turned the conversation upon parish matters, as the best way of taking the conceit out of her. For I don't believe in clergymen's wives setting themselves up to patronise their lady parishioners, on whose favour and subscriptions (to put it coarsely) their husbands' livelihood depends.

On my way home I was fortunate enough to encounter Spencer Gale himself. He was looking very well and handsome, riding a magnificent horse, which curveted and pranced all over the road when he checked its gallop in obedience to my uplifted hand. I felt a thrill of maternal pride as I gazed at him—of maternal anxiety also.

"My boy," I cried, "do pray be careful! Remember what happened to poor Harry from this sort of rashness, and what a valuable life it is that you are risking!"

"Oh, it's all right, Mrs. Braye," he re-

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sponded, in his nice, cheerful way. "It is only oats and high spirits. How's Harry? Getting along like a house afire, Mary tells me. I'm awfully glad."

Dear fellow! His kindness touched me to the heart. I suppose he was afraid to dismount from that obstreperous beast, lest he should lose control of it, and I am sure he could not help the way it tried to trample on me with its hind legs when I came near enough to talk.

I told him how beautifully Harry was doing, and how he was to have his first dinner with us on Sunday, and how delighted he would be to see an old friend on such an occasion—and so on. Spencer seemed not to understand me for a moment, owing to the clatter of the horse, for he said he could not come because he was going to dine with the Governor at the Melbourne Club.

"But that is to-night," I called. "And we want you for the day after to-morrow—Sunday. Just a simple family meal at half-past one—pot-luck, you know."

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He did not answer for some minutes—thinking over his engagements, doubtless; then he asked whether *all* of us were at home. Aha! I knew what that meant, though of course I pretended I didn't. I said that no member of the family would be so heartless as to absent herself from such a festival as Harry's first dinner; that, on the contrary, his sister was more devoted to him, and far more indispensable both to him and to the house than a dozen hospital nurses. I described in a few words what Phyllis had been to us during our time of trouble, and he smiled with pleasure. And of course he consented to accept the casual invitation for her sake, pretending reluctance just to save appearances. It was arranged that he would be at his sister's on Sunday, and walk back with us after morning service.

I told Tom in the evening, when he was sitting in the garden with his pipe, in a good temper. You would have supposed I was announcing some dreadful domestic calamity.

"Whatever for?" he grumbled, with a

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most injured air. "I thought we were to be a comfortable family party, just ourselves, and no fuss at all."

"There will be no fuss," I said, "unless you make it. He is just coming in a friendly, informal manner, to fill the vacant place. If you will have Dr. Juke, there must be another man to balance the table."

"But why that man? You know Harry can't bear him since he's got so uppish about his money and his swell friends. Why not have somebody of our own class?—though I think it perfectly unnecessary to have anybody under the circumstances."

"Our own class!" I indignantly exclaimed. "I hope you don't insult your children, not to speak of me, by implying that they are not good enough for Gales to associate with?"

"They are," said Tom; "they are—and a lot too good for one Gale to associate with. But he don't think so, Polly."

"If he did not, would he do it?" was my unanswerable retort. But it is useless trying

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to argue with a prejudiced man who is determined not to see reason. And I felt it wise to leave him before he could draw me into a dispute.

Harry, however, was equally exasperating. He said, "Oh, then I shall make it Monday, if you don't mind. Better a dinner of herbs on washing-day in peace and comfort than a stalled ox on Sunday with Spencer Gale to spoil one's appetite and digestion for it." But Emily rebuked him on my behalf. She had but to look at him to make him do what she wished, and I suppose she thought it good policy to propitiate the future mother-in-law.

Phyllis, whom I had expected to please—for whose sake I had gone to all this trouble—was simply insolent. Alas! it is the tendency of girls in these days. Respect for parents, trust in their judgment and deference to their wishes, all the modest, dutiful ways that were the rule when I was young, seem quite to have gone out of fashion. You would have thought that she was the mother and I the daughter if you had heard how she spoke to

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me, and seen the superior air with which she stood over me to signify her royal displeasure.

"Oh, well, you have just gone and spoilt the whole thing—that's all."

I could have cried with mortification. But then, what's the use? It is only what wives and mothers must expect when they try to do their best for their families.

I had another struggle with her on Sunday morning. She refused to accompany us to church. She said she was not going to offer herself to Spencer Gale as a companion for a half-hour's walk—that he was quite conceited enough without that; if other girls chose to run after him and spoil him, she didn't. As if *I* would ask her to run after any man! And as if Emily or I could not have walked home with our guest! But I learned a little later what all this prudishness amounted to. When we came back from church—Emily, Lily, Spencer, and I—we found an empty drawing-room, Harry and Tom in armchairs on the verandah, and Phyllis away in the kitchen garden gathering straw-

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berries for dessert with Dr. Juke! And I discovered that that young man had interpreted an invitation to lunch at half-past one as meaning that he should arrive punctually at twelve. Tom pretended that he had called professionally at that hour, and been persuaded to put his buggy up in our stables and remain.

"And I suppose you persuaded him?" I said, trying—because Spencer was standing by me—to keep what I felt out of my voice.

"Well, my dear," replied the fatuous man, "the truth is, he didn't want much pressing."

There are times when I feel that I could shake Tom, he is so wooden-headed and silly—though so dear.

However, Phyllis, when I called her in, greeted Spencer Gale with proper cordiality; and the whole family behaved better than I had expected they would. They seemed to lay themselves out to be pleasant all round, and to make Harry's first day downstairs a happy one. It was a delightful early-sum-

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mer day—he could not have had a better—and our pretty home was looking its prettiest, for we had had nice rains that year. Phyllis had decorated the table beautifully with roses, and Jane had surpassed herself in cooking the dinner. The pig was done to a turn—I never tasted anything so delicious—and the turkey was a picture. We had our own green peas and asparagus and young potatoes, and our own cream whipped in the meringues and coffee jelly—in short, it was as good a dinner as any millionaire could wish for, and in the end everything seemed to go as I had intended it should.

Harry was no trouble at all. I purposely put him at his father's end of the table, with Emily between him and Juke, to pacify him; and, with his young lady at his side and Spencer as far off as possible, the dear boy was as gay and good-tempered as could be, quite the life of the party. Spencer sat between me and Phyllis, and she really seemed to devote herself to him. I was surprised to see how little fear she evidently had of appearing to

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throw herself at his head, like the other girls; she chattered and joked to him—the prettiest colour and animation in her face—and hardly glanced at Juke opposite, who, for his part, confined his attentions to his neighbours, Miss Blount and me, and was particularly unobtrusive and quiet.

As for Spencer Gale, he was most interesting in his descriptions of what he had seen and done during his recent European travels; it was quite an education to listen to him. I was particularly pleased that he was so ready to talk on this subject, because I hate to have the children grow up narrow-minded and provincial, ignorant of the world outside their colony. It has been the dream of my life to take them home and give them advantages, and I have never been able to realise it. I could not help thinking, as that young man discoursed of Paris and Venice and all the rest of it, what a delightful honeymoon his bride might have! And so she did, as it turned out, no great while afterwards.

Harry yawned and fidgeted, for sitting

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long in one position tired him; so Tom and Juke carried him to a cane lounge on the verandah before the rest of us had had dessert. I was annoyed with Phyllis for running out to get pillows, which were already there, and for not returning when she had made her brother comfortable. Emily had the grace to remain at table, and of course Lily stayed also. She is a most intelligent child, voracious for information of all sorts; and she plied our guest with so many questions, and amused him so much by her interest in his adventures, that she made him forget the strawberries on his plate and how time was going—forgetting herself that the poor servants were wanting to clear away so that they might get out for their Sunday walk.

At last he finished, and I led the way to the verandah, where I expected to find the others. But only Harry and his father were there, the boy looking rather fagged and inclined to doze, and Tom—who has no manners—placidly sucking at his pipe.

"Why, where is Phyllis?" I inquired.

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"Kitchen," said Harry promptly, opening his eyes.

"And the doctor?"

"Gone off to a patient."

"Then," said I, "come and let me show you my roses, Mr. Gale;" and I took his arm. I thought it a good opportunity to have a little quiet talk with him on my own account. Afterwards I remembered that my husband and son watched us rather anxiously as we sauntered off into the garden, but I did not notice it at the time. It never crossed my mind that they could deliberately conspire to deceive me.

I had had the garden tidied, and, in the first flush of the summer bloom, it looked really beautiful—although I say it. I would not have been ashamed to show it to the Queen herself. And our rustic cottage, that we had continually been adding to and improving ever since it came, a mere shanty, into our hands, was a study for a painter, with the yellow banksia in perfection, quite hiding the framework of the verandah. I halted my com-

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panion on the front lawn, at the prettiest point of view.

"A humble little place," I remarked; "but I think I may say for it, without undue vanity, that it looks like the home of gentlefolks."

He followed my gaze, and fixed his eyes upon the particular window which I informed him belonged to Phyllis's room.

"What's she doing?" he inquired bluntly. He could not conceal his impatience for her return.

I told him that, in the case of so variously useful a person, it was impossible to say. I had no doubt she was attending to housekeeping matters, which she never neglected for her own amusement. Then I threw out a feeler or two, to test him—to learn, if possible, something of his tastes and character; it was necessary, for her sake, to do so. And I was delighted to find that he shared my opinion of the colonial girl as a type, and agreed with me that the term "unprotected female" should in these days be altered to "unpro-

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tected male," seeing that it was the women who did all the courting, and the men who were exposed to masked batteries, as it were, at every turn.

"A fellow's never safe till he's married," said the poor boy, doubtless speaking from painful experience. "And not then."

"That depends," said I. "There are people—I know plenty—who, having married dolls like those we have been speaking of, find themselves far indeed from being safe; but choose a good, modest, clever, loving girl, who has been well brought up—one devoted to her home and unspoiled by a vulgar society—and it is quite another pair of shoes, as my husband would say. By the way, ask *him* what he thinks of marriage for young men."

"I don't know that I want to ask anybody anything," he returned, a little irritably—for Phyllis was still invisible—"except to leave me alone to do as I like. I don't believe in having wives selected for me, Mrs. Braye; I'm always telling my mother and sisters that, and they won't pay the least attention. I

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think a fellow might be allowed to please himself, especially a fellow in my position."

"Certainly," I said, with all the emphasis I could command. "*Most* certainly. That is my own view exactly. I have always said that, in respect of my own children, I would never force or thwart them in any way. I chose the one I loved, regardless of wealth or poverty, and they shall do the same. More than that," I added gaily, "I am going to be the most charming mother-in-law that ever was! I shall quite redeem the character. I will never attempt to interfere with my children's households—never be *de trop*—never—oh! Why, there she is!"

We were turning into a quiet path between tall shrubs—the fatal place where, as I was told, Harry had been entrapped—and I suddenly saw the gleam of a white dress in a little bower at the end of it. At the same moment I saw—so did Spencer Gale—a thing that petrified us both. I was struck speechless, but his emotion forced him to hysteric laughter.

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"I'm afraid," said he, recovering himself, "that we are *de trop* this time, at any rate."

"Not at all," I retorted, also rallying my self-command. "Not at all. We don't have anything of that sort in this family."

But the facts were too palpable; it was useless pretending to ignore them. Phyllis jumped out of the arbour, like an alarmed bird out of its nest, and came strolling towards us, affecting a nonchalant air, but with a face the colour of beetroot with confusion; and that unspeakable doctor, who had caused her so to forget herself, strutted at her side, twirling the tip of his moustache and endeavouring to appear as if he had not been kissing her, but looking all the time the very image of detected guilt.

It is not necessary to state that Spencer Gale left immediately, and never darkened our doors again. When, a little later, I had it out with Phyllis, she declared, with a toss of the head, that she wouldn't have taken him if there had been no other marriageable man living—that there was only one husband for

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her, whom she intended to have whether we liked it or not, even if she were forced to wait for him till she was an old woman. I have often regretted that I did not control myself better, but she, who had no excuse for violence, behaved like a perfect lunatic. She went so far as to say she would never forgive me for the insults I had heaped upon one—meaning Edmund Juke—who had no equal in the universe, and who had saved her brother's life. Of course she did not mean it—and I did not mean it—and we forgave each other long ago; but I never hear the name of Spencer Gale without the memory of that interview coming back to me, like a bitter taste in the mouth.

He married about the same time as she did—a significant circumstance! They say that he lost his boom money when the boom burst, and that he drinks rather badly, and makes domestic scandals of various kinds. If he does, it is no more than one might have expected, considering the provocation. It is all very well for my family to repeat these

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tales to his discredit, and then point to Edmund Juke in Collins Street gradually climbing to the top of his profession; they think this is sufficient to prove that they were always Solomons of wisdom, and I a fool of the first magnitude. It does not occur to them that if some things had been different, all things would have been different. The one man would never have fallen into low habits if he had had Phyllis for his wife, and the other would never have risen so high if he had not had her. That is how I look at it. And as for material prosperity, no one could have foreseen how things were going to turn out, and luck is like the rain that falls on the just and on the unjust—it comes to the people who don't deserve it quite as often as to those who do.

For my part, I pay no heed to malicious gossip. There are always envious persons ready and anxious to pull down those who are placed above them; if they cannot find a legitimate pretext, they invent one. I see for myself that he still lives in his beautiful Kew

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house, that his wife still leads the fashion at every important social function and drives the finest turn-out in Melbourne; that does not look as if they were so very poor. And if one *could* forgive infidelities in a married man, it would be in the case of one tied to a painted creature who evidently cares for nothing but display and admiration—to have her photograph flaunted in the public streets, and herself surrounded by a crowd of so-called smart people, flattering her vanity for the sake of her husband's position. He may have a handsome establishment, but he cannot have a *home.* So who can wonder if he seeks comfort elsewhere, and flies to the bottle to drown his grief? It would have been very, very different if my beautiful Phyllis had been at the head of affairs.

However, if she is satisfied, it is not for me to say a word.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE SILVER WEDDING.

Emily went to her school in Melbourne, and I had to get another governess for Lily. She was a horrid woman. I stood her for one quarter, and then packed her off; and we had to pay her for six months, because she threatened to sue us for breach of contract. The next that I procured was a clever person enough, and not wanting in good manners, but she ordered the servants about as if the house belonged to her, and of course they resented it. So did I. Emily's gentle unobtrusiveness had spoiled us for ways of that sort. Moreover, Miss Scott was terribly severe upon Lily; the child was always in tears over lessons that were too hard for her. I did not believe in overstraining a growing girl, and ventured to remonstrate now and then on her

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behalf; but Miss Scott was quite above taking advice from her elders and betters—as good as asked me to mind my own business, or, at any rate, to allow her to know hers. So I thought it best to make a change.

And then I was deceived by false representations into engaging a widow lady, who had seen better days. She was recommended to me as an experienced teacher, having held situations in high families before her marriage; and I naturally supposed that one who had been a mother herself would be a safer guide for a young girl than one who had not. But words cannot describe what a wretch that woman was. There is something about widows —I don't know what it is—something that seems almost improper—especially those that are by way of being young and pretty, like Mrs. Underwood, though she was all forty, if she was a day, in spite of her baby airs and graces and her butter-yellow hair. She had the audacity to try and flirt with Tom, under cover of her pathetic stories of her lost husband and children, and those better days

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that were a pure invention; and he was too idiotically stupid—that is, too innocent and simple-minded—to see what was so glaringly transparent to everybody else. He used to think her an ill-used woman and pity her, and think me hard and unfeeling because I didn't. Oh, never will I have a widow about my house again! She entirely destroyed our domestic peace. Things came to such a pass, indeed, that Tom even threatened—seriously, and not in a joke—to get out his captain's certificate and return to sea, because his home, that had always been so happy, had become unbearable.

She went at last, and then I felt that I had had enough of governesses. Determined that I would never undergo such misery again, and at the same time strongly objecting to boarding-schools for girls, there was nothing for it but to superintend Lily's general studies myself, and take her into town for special lessons. I did not like the job, and found her very tiresome and disheartening; she seemed to mope, all alone, and would not interest herself

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in anything. A girl in these days is never satisfied with her mother for a companion, and after a time, when the Jukes were settled in their Melbourne house, I was glad to let her go on long visits to her sister. There she found plenty to occupy and amuse her, while I sat solitary at home, working for them both.

For I had no children left when she was away. The difficulty of the governess was not the only trouble that resulted from Emily's desertion of me. Harry also forsook the nest. He said it was inconvenient to live so far from his office, though he had never thought of that while she was with us, and that it would be better for business reasons to have a lodging in town. I did not attempt to thwart him. And so, as soon as he was strong enough to return to regular work—so valued was he by the shipping firm which employed him that they had kept his situation open during his illness—he took himself and a new bicycle to a stuffy Melbourne suburb, where he would be in the way of meet-

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ing his beloved frequently at the houses of her friends.

I wanted to settle in Melbourne too, to be near them all. But our little place was our own—a valuable property, yet unsaleable in these bad times—and Tom said we could not afford it. Besides, I knew he would be miserable cooped up in streets, and lost without his pigs and vegetable garden.

Thus we felt ourselves stranded on the shore while our young ones put to sea—deserted in our old age—which, after all, is the common fate. Only we were not in our old age, either of us. I have not a grey hair in my head, even now, and have more than once been taken for Phyllis's elder sister. On the day that she was married, when I wore pale heliotrope relieved with white, I overheard old Captain Saunders—and a man of eighty ought to be a judge—say to Mr. Welshman, "She's a pretty girl, but her mother can beat her." And I should like to see the man of forty who is the equal of what my husband was at fifty-five—or is at his "present-day"

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age, which comes to little more. Tom is stout certainly, but only in a dignified and commanding fashion; he can out-do Harry in feats of strength, and his fine, bronzed face, with those keen blue eyes in it, has a power of manliness that kings might envy. For the matter of that, kings are not nearly so much of kings as he was accustomed to being on board his ships. I know the lady passengers made themselves ridiculous by the way they scrambled for his notice and a seat beside him at the saloon table.

To people like Mrs. Underwood, though she was really my contemporary, I may seem very *passée*—no doubt I do—and a perfect granny to the children, who regard youth and beauty as solely the prerogatives of bread-and-butter misses in their teens; but—as Captain Saunders's remark indicated—I am not too old to charm where I want to charm. No, indeed; nor ever shall be—to one person, at all events. When Tom and I woke up on our silver wedding morning and kissed each other, did we not know what love meant as much and

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more than we had ever done, without needing Juke and Phyllis, and Harry and his Emily to teach us? I should think so, indeed! It seems to me that it *requires* the fulness of many years, fatherhood and motherhood in all stages and phases, innumerable steps of painful experience climbed together, to bring us to the perfect comprehension of love—the best love—that love in the lore of which those children, who think themselves so knowing, are mere beginners, with the alphabet to learn.

And this, by the way—it has just this moment occurred to me—is the kernel of the woman question, which seems so vastly complicated. Why, it is as simple as it can possibly be. The whole thing is in a nutshell. Those advocates and defenders of this and that, arguing so passionately and inconclusively at such interminable length—how silly they are! You have one set of people raving for female suffrage and equal rights and liberties with tyrant man; you have another set of people storming at them for thus ignoring the intentions of Nature, the interests of

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the house and family. The intentions of Nature, indeed! The house and family! When millions of poor women are old maids who haven't chosen to be so!—who, of course, *could* not choose to be so, unless physiologically defective in some way or another. Poor, poor things! They don't want equal rights with man, but equal rights with the lower animals. As they don't know what they miss, they may be forgiven for the way they speak of it in their books and speeches; but if they had it—if all had it who by nature are entitled to it—there would be no more woman question. I am quite convinced of that. Nature's intentions would then really be fulfilled, and the other troubles of the case, all secondary and contingent, would vanish. Of course they would. Man is not a tyrant, bless him! The child is the only tyrant—the legitimate power that keeps woman in her place.

But, oh, how much that child does cost us! We give all freely, and would give a thousand times more if we had it to give, for it

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is the most precious of human privileges—the thing we really live for, though it is inconvenient to admit it; but we pay with heart's blood, from the beginning to the end. We pay so much and so constantly that it often seems to me that the poor childless ones, undeveloped and inexperienced, who cannot know the great joys of life, are also exempt from all sorrow that is worthy of the name.

Baby-rearing, absorbingly interesting though it be, is really a terrible business; and the fewer the babies the worse it is. You hardly know what it means to have a night's rest for dread of the ever-recurring epidemics that so fatally ravage the nurseries of this country. Day and night you have the shadow of the clinical thermometer, your sword of Damocles, hanging over you, and are afraid to breathe lest you should bring it down. Then, when this hair-whitening strain begins to slacken a little and you think you are going to have an easy time, the children that are now able to take care of themselves utterly refuse to do so. Your girl goes wet-footed with a

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light heart, and you never see a telegraph messenger coming to the house without expecting to hear that your boy at school has broken his arm at football or his neck bird's-nesting. They follow their mischievous devices, and you can't help it; you can only cluck and fuss like a futile hen running round the pond in which her brood of ducklings is splashing. That's worse than baby-rearing, because you can at least do what you like with a baby.

And then, when you pride yourself on having successfully got through the long struggle, and you tell yourself that now they are going to be a help and a comfort to you at last, off they go to the first stranger who beckons to them, and think no more about you than of an old nurse who has served her purpose—probably turning round to point out the errors you have committed, and to show you how much better you would have done if you had taken their advice. And that is worst of all.

No trouble that I had had with mine,

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while they were with me, equalled the trouble of being without them, especially on the silver wedding morning, when I had, as it were, the field of my married life before me; when I felt that a golden harvest was my due, and beheld a ravaged garden with all its flowers plucked. It was my own fault that no letters of congratulation came by the first post; I had purposely refrained from reminding the children of the approaching anniversary, just to see if they would remember it, and they had been too full of their own concerns to give it a thought. Afterwards they scolded me for not telling them, and were very repentant. I had no present either—that is, not on the day. Tom had given me a silver *entrée* dish, and I had given him a silver-mounted claret-jug; but we had made our purchases a week too soon, and had been unable to keep the matter secret from each other. It was a wet morning, and I, being the first downstairs, was greeted with the smell of burnt porridge in the kitchen. I thought it too bad of Jane to let such a thing happen on such an occasion, and

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a hardship that rain should be running like tears down the breakfast-room window panes when I so particularly wanted to be cheered. It was April, the month of broken weather, and leaves were falling thickly on the beds and paths outside. I surveyed the dripping prospect, and noted how impossible it was to keep the weeds down, with the summer-warmed earth so moist; and I turned back into the room to see a late-lit fire fading on the hearth, and the children's empty chairs against the wall.

Well, I sat down behind the two lonely tea-cups and bowed my head on the table, on the point of tears—feeling that I too was a denuded autumn tree, an outworn woman who had had her day. And then, before I could get out my handkerchief, Tom came in.

He kicked two logs together, and the dying fire sprang to life; he opened a window, and the freshest and sweetest morning air poured in, sprinkled with a gentle shower and hinting at coming sunshine.

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"What a lovely day we've got, eh, Polly? What a beautiful rain! This'll bring the grass on, and make the land splendid for ploughing, hey? What's the matter, old girl? Missing the children? Oh, well, they're happy; we've nothing to fret about on their account—nor on our own either—and that's more than most people can say on their silver wedding morning. Porridge spoilt? Oh, that's no matter—we have something better than porridge. Here, Jane! Jane! Bring in the you know what, if you've got 'em ready."

Jane came in, smiling, with the new *entrée* dish in her hands. Tom watched it with gleeful eyes, and assisted to place it on the table. It was his little surprise for me—mushrooms, to which I am extravagantly partial—the first of the season. He had gone to Melbourne the day before to buy them, and it was her absorption in the task of cooking them delicately which had caused Jane to neglect the porridge—Tom's first course at every breakfast.

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"There" said he, as he lifted the shining lid. He was as pleased as a boy with his plot and its *dénouement.*

"Oh, you *precious!*" I responded; and the gratitude he expected brought tears to my eyes. "No one *ever* had such a husband as mine!"

He beamed complacently, and sat down beside me, inconveniently close. With his arm round my waist, he helped me to pour out the coffee, and spilled it on the cloth; he fed me with the best of the mushrooms and morsels of beef steak, and wiped gravy from my lips with his own napkin. He seemed to feel that I needed some extra comfort to make up for the children's absence, though he said repeatedly that it was only fitting we should have our wedding-day, whether gold, silver, or pewter, to ourselves.

"As for you," he said, "I declare you don't look a day older than when I married you, Polly. Oh, well, a little fuller in the figure, perhaps; but that's an improvement.

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Old Saunders is quite right—you can beat the young girls still."

I told him he could beat the young men in the making of pretty speeches, and I pretended not to believe his flatteries; but I knew that he meant every word he said, being the sincerest of men. And my spirits rose by leaps and bounds, until I felt even younger than I looked, and like a real bride once more, just as if those strenuous intermediate years had dropped out of the calendar. The barometer was rising too. Before we had finished our mushrooms the rain had all passed off, and the sun was shining on a clean and fragrant earth. Everything outside glittered and shimmered. It was a thoroughly bridal morning, after all.

"And now, what shall we do?" my husband inquired, having lit his pipe and taken a rapid glance over the newspaper. "We must do something to celebrate the day. What shall it be?"

"It doesn't much matter what, so long as we do it together," was my reply. "But I

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think I should like to go out somewhere, shouldn't you? It is going to be the perfection of weather."

"Oh, we'll go out, of course. We'll have a day's sight-seeing, and our lunch in town. Let's see"—we studied the "Amusements" column, as we had so often seen the children do—"there's the Cyclorama; we have never seen the Cyclorama yet, and I'm told it's splendid."

"And it is years since we were at the Picture Gallery," I remarked. "There must be dozens of pictures there that we have never seen."

"We might go to the Zoölogical Gardens. If there was one thing more than another that I was fond of as a boy it was a wild beast show. They feed them at four o'clock."

"Yes, and the seals at the Aquarium too. I remember seeing the seals fed at Exhibition time. It was most interesting."

"And they've got Deeming at the Waxworks, Harry says——"

"Oh, Tom—waxworks! However, I

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don't see why we shouldn't go to waxworks if we feel inclined. We are free agents. There is nobody to criticise us now."

I began to feel that it was really almost a relief to be without the children, just for once in a way. Children are so dreadfully severe and proper in their views of what fathers and mothers ought to do.

"Well, go and get your things on," said my husband, "while I have a look round outside."

He dashed off to see that pigs and fowls were fed, and the boy started on his day's work; and I ran into the kitchen to tell Jane not to cook anything, and upstairs to change my dress and put on my best bonnet. In our haste to make the most of our holiday, we frisked about like young dogs let off the chain. It did not matter how undignified it looked, since there was nobody to laugh at us.

Before ten o'clock we were off, and before eleven we were in Melbourne, sliding up Collins Street on a tram dummy, on our way to the Cyclorama. The Picture Gallery had

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been set down as a first item of the programme —it opened at ten, and one had the place to one's self during the forenoon—but afterwards we put it at the bottom of the list, and finally struck it out altogether. Our feeling was that we could do pictures at any time—pictures were things young people would thoroughly approve of as an amusement for parents—but that we could not always do exactly as we liked. So we went to the Cyclorama first, and were so intensely interested that we stayed there nearly an hour. We had read of the battle of Waterloo in our school books, but never realised it in the least; now we were like eye-witnesses of the fight, and the whole thing was clear to us. A soldier amongst the spectators pointed out a number of mistakes in the arrangements of troops and guns, but we did not understand them, and did not want to; indeed, we would not listen to him. We moved round and round in our dark watch-tower to the quiet places, and gazed over the far-stretching fields with more delight than our first peep-show at an English

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fair had given us. The illusion of distance was so complete that it corrected all crudities of detail, and we simply lost ourselves in the romance of the past and our own imaginations.

"Never saw anything so wonderful in my life," said Tom, as at last we tore ourselves away. "I seem to smell that chateau burning, and to hear those poor chaps groaning with their wounds. I'm glad we went, aren't you, Polly?"

I truthfully replied that I was very glad indeed, and we emerged into the street, and he hailed a passing tram. Again we took our places on the dummy, that we might see and feel as much of the bright day as possible. Melbourne was still gay and busy, in spite of gloomy commercial forecasts, and the weather was all that a perfect autumn morning could make it. The sun shone now with an evident intention to continue doing so till bed-time, and we basked in it on the dummy seat like two cats.

"What shall we do next?" asked Tom,

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consulting his watch. "It is not near lunch-time yet. We must get an appetite for the sort of meal I mean to have to-day."

Before we could make up our minds what to do next, the tram had carried us into Burke Street, and lo! there was the temple of the waxworks staring us in the face. Tom signalled the conductor, and we jumped off, hand in hand, and without a word made our way to the door of the show which we had heard even young children speak of as beneath contempt—only fit for bloodthirsty schoolboys of the lower orders and louts from the country who knew no better.

Well, we were from the country; and, whatever the artistic shortcomings of this exhibition, it had the charm of novelty at any rate. Neither of us had been to waxworks since we were taken as infant's to Madame Tussaud's. This was a far cry from Madame Tussaud's, but I must confess that it amused us very well for half an hour. The effigies were full of humour, and the instruments of torture in the chamber of horrors very real

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and creepy. Also there were some relics of old colonial days that were decidedly interesting. In short, we did not feel that we had wasted time and two shillings when we had gone through the place, though we pretended to have done so, laughing at each other, saying, "How silly we are!"

"Well, let's be silly," said Tom, at last. "There's no law against that, that I know of."

"None whatever," I gaily responded. "There's nobody to——"

"Hush!" he exclaimed, interrupting what I was going to say with a sharp snatch at my arm. We were just leaving the wax-works, and he pulled me back within the door.

"What's the matter?" I cried, bewildered by his sudden action and tone of alarm.

"Come back—come back!" he whispered excitedly. "For Heaven's sake, don't let her see us?"

"Who? who?"

He pointed to the street, and I had a mo-

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mentary glimpse of our daughter Phyllis going by in her husband's buggy. Edmund, in his tall town hat, which glittered in the sun, was driving her himself; she sat beside him under her parasol, calm, matronly, dignified, a model of all propriety. How would she have looked if she had seen her mother coming out of the waxworks? It was quite a shock to think of it.

"She has been shopping," said Tom casually, "and Ted's been out after patients, and has picked her up, sending the groom home. It isn't every Collins Street doctor who'd let his wife be seen with him in the professional vehicle. Ted's a good fellow and a first-rate husband. We have a lot to be thankful for, Polly."

"We have," I assented, drawing a long breath of relief. For the moment I was most thankful that my dear girl, whom I had so yearned for, was out of sight. The coast was clear, and we sallied forth once more in pursuit of our own devices. Being still not quite as hungry as Tom desired, we strolled around

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the block and looked in at the shop windows —the florists, the milliners, the photographers.

"Do you remember," said Tom, as we gazed upon a galaxy of Melbourne beauties smiling down upon the street, "how we had our likenesses taken in our wedding clothes?"

"And, oh, such clothes!" I interjected. "A flounced skirt over a crinoline, a spoon bonnet——"

"It was the image of you, my dear, and I wouldn't part with that picture for the world. I say, let's go and be done now. I'd like a memento of this day, to look at when the golden wedding comes. Just as you are, in that nice tailor tweed—in your prime, Polly."

I told him it was nonsense, but he would have it. The people said they would be ready for us at 2.30, and when we had had an immense lunch, and were both looking red and puffy after it, we were photographed together, like any pair of cheap trippers—I sitting in an attitude, with my head screwed round, he standing over me, with a hand on my shoul-

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der. The result may now be seen in a handsome frame on his smoking-room mantelpiece. He thinks it beautiful.

After the operation we had a cup of tea in the nearest restaurant, and by that time it was too late to think of the Zoölogical Gardens, which closed at five, and required a whole day to reveal all their treasures. But we thought we might be in time to see the seals fed, and so took tram again for the Exhibition building. As we entered the Aquarium through the green gloom of the Fernery, we heard the creatures barking, and saw the keeper walking towards the tanks with his basket of fish. We were in good time, and there was no great crowd to-day, so that we could stand close to the iron bars and see all the tricks of the man and the beasts, which were unspeakably funny. I don't know when I have laughed so much as I laughed that afternoon. And Tom was just as much amused as I was.

But when the last fish had been thrown and caught, and we sat down on a bench to

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rest for a minute, he fell suddenly silent, and I thought he appeared a little tired.

"I know what it is," I said, looking at him. "You are just dying for a pipe."

"No," he answered; "at least, not particularly. But I'll tell you what I do seem to long for, Polly, and that's a sight of blue water. Looking at those creatures diving and splashing somehow reminds me of it. I haven't seen the sea for months."

"Oh, you poor boy!" I exclaimed, jumping up. "Why didn't you say so at first—at the beginning of the day? I never once thought of it. Of course we ought to have been beside the sea on our silver wedding-day —the sea that married us in the beginning— or else on it. Let us get down to Swanston Street at once, and take a St. Kilda tram. There is time to reach the pier before the sun goes down, and we can stay there till dark, and dine at the Esplanade. It will be a nice long ride, and you can have your pipe on the dummy as we go."

"All right," he said, with renewed alac-

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rity. "Mind you, Polly, I couldn't have enjoyed the day more than I have done, so far as it has gone; but a sniff of brine to top up with will just make it perfect."

So we had our sniff of brine. It took three-quarters of an hour to get it, but the drive was delightful in the fresh evening air; the rain had laid the dust of that dustiest of Melbourne roads, and C-spring barouches are not easier to travel in than the cable tramcars on it. Tom had the comfort of his pipe, allowable on the dummy; and the scent of his good tobacco, which the breeze carried from me, was a scent I loved for its associations' sake. When we got to St. Kilda the sun was low; no effect of atmosphere and sea water could have been more lovely. It was only bay water, to be sure, but it was salt, and it sufficed. We called in at the hotel to order our dinner, and walked down and out to the end of the pier, and sat there silently until the ruddy full moon rose. At night, when all was white and shining, we returned there and sat for an hour more, hand in hand.

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"What it must be," said Tom, soliloquising, "outside!"

"Ah-h!" I sighed deeply. The same thought had been in both our minds all through the silence which he had broken with his remark. If he had not made it, I should have done so. In imagination we were "outside" together, as in our youth; the scent of sea in the brisk air had acted on us like the familiar touch of a mesmerist on a subject long surrendered to his power; the nostalgia of the seafarer, the sea-lover—which is a thing no other person can understand—had taken hold of us; it was as if some long silent mother-voice called to us across the bay, "Come home, come home!"

Near us, sheltered in the angle of the pier, a bunch of sail boats tugged gently at their ropes; the flopping, squelching sound made by the run of the tide between and under them was sweet in our ears, like an old song. A little way off some yachts of the local club lay each at its own moorings, a hull and a bare pole, ink-black on the shining water. Tom

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was no yachtsman, of course; he even had a contempt for the modern egg-shell craft, all sail and spar, in which the young men out of the shops and offices raced for cups on summer Saturdays; they were as children's toys in his estimation. But a boat is a boat, and, feeling as I did, and thinking of the remark he had made in the Aquarium, and how I had unaccountably forgotten what we ought to have done on our silver wedding-day, I said—

"Why shouldn't we have a silver honeymoon, and spend it at sea?"

Though he did not answer at once, and though his face was turned from me towards an incoming steamer, a distant streak of shadow sprinkled with lights, that he was trying to identify, I knew that he jumped straight at the suggestion with all his heart.

"Hm-m," he mused; "ha-hm-m. That's not a bad idea of yours, Polly. I daresay it might be done, if you think you'd like it. We have no children to tie us at home—Harry would keep an eye on the pigs and

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things—it would do us all the good in the world—by Jove, yes!" He sat erect and alert. "Why, the very thought of it makes me feel twenty years younger. I don't see why we shouldn't have a silver honeymoon while we are about it. But what sort of a trip do you fancy? Portland and Warrnambool? Tasmania? New Zealand? I'm afraid Europe is a bit too large an order."

"Nothing of that sort at all," I urged; "but something that we can do all by ourselves, without being interfered with." I pointed to the boats near us. "A yachting cruise to some of the places I have never seen, if you could find a strong, homely sort of yacht, with bulwarks and a cabin in it. Perhaps a hired man or two—yes, that would even give us greater freedom—if there was a place for them to sleep in away from us."

I enlarged upon my idea, while he listened and nodded, proposing amendments here and there; then he jumped up in his resolute way, lifting me with him.

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"Let us get home and to bed," said he, "and I'll be up first thing in the morning to see about it. We must save this weather and the moon—the honeymoon, Polly."

We bustled back to town. And whom should we meet in the tram but an old brother salt, who knew exactly what we wanted and where it was to be had—a stout, yawl-rigged craft with something beside lead keel under water, not too smart to look at, but able to travel, and warranted safe "outside" as no ordinary pleasure yacht could be. One day sufficed to stock this vessel with our requirements, and on the morning of the next we set sail, with one quiet man for crew, and a minute dinghy behind us, bound for no port in particular, and to no programme—determined to be free for once, if we never were again. The children thought us quite silly, naturally. I believe Harry felt it something of a hardship to have to give up Emily's society occasionally for the sake of the pigs, and I am sure, though I did not hear them, that Phyllis and Lily made remarks on their poor

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dear mother's erratic fancies, and the way poor father gave in to them. Phyllis took the opportunity of my absence to "settle up the house," as she called it—meaning my house, and that matters there had fallen into a sad state since she had ceased to superintend them.

But we were emancipated now. We were out of school. I was able to wear—what they had considered inappropriate for years—a hat to keep off the hot sea sunshine, which burns old faces as badly as young ones; and I could fish, and paddle barefoot, and sing, and talk nonsense to Tom to my heart's content, with no sense of appearing ridiculous or undignified to anybody. The crew was an old Bendigo hand, about the age of my father, devoted to us both; and Tom was like a boy again, with the tiller in his hand. What ages it was since he had steered a sailing boat, of any sort or size! Yet even I could tell the difference in a moment, as soon as he took the helm. Not only did he make the yawl do exactly what he wanted, but he seemed to

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know exactly what *she* wanted as well. It was the same sort of sympathy as that between a perfect rider and a horse that thoroughly understands and trusts him. Some people—good seamen in everything else—can never steer like that, although they may have been a lifetime at it. It is an instinct, like good riding, inherited and not acquired. Tom's people had been sailors since the Battle of the Nile.

How he *did* love it, to be sure! And *what* a holiday that was! We had our little discomforts of various kinds, and I was seasick for a night and seedy all the day afterwards; but these trifles were of no account in the sum of our vast enjoyment, and cannot even be remembered now. Looking back on that cruise—that last cruise—perhaps the very last in life—it is one idyllic dream, simply. I find it hard to believe that it could have happened in such a prosaic world.

I daresay that much of the fairyland feeling was due to weather. There is no weather on earth like Australian weather for making

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holiday in—that is, when it is good. What fell to us on this memorable occasion was as good as good could be—fine and fresh by day, calm and beautiful by night, with various effects of moonlight, each sweeter than the rest. The beginnings of the days were the best of them, perhaps. We went to bed betimes—in that not too spacious chamber of ours between the big and the little masts—and so were ready to see the sunrise, to bathe ourselves in the clean, sharp, early morning air, to set about clearing up the cabin, airing the mattresses on deck, frying the eggs and bacon or newly caught fish, and cooking the coffee over the spirit stove, before the land people were astir, every vein in our bodies thrilling to the salt breeze, tingling with health, and our appetites keen as razors. Later, we would visit the shore for provisions, for newspapers, for a hotel meal, to send inquiring telegrams to our family and await replies, to amuse ourselves with a ramble in the bush or through the bay watering-places whose summer season had ebbed away from

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them. Later still, I lay prone on deck, snoozing over a novel, while Tom and the crew sailed the boat, and smoked, and talked shop in contented growls, a couple of sentences at a time. Then tea, and washing up, and the fishing lines got out; and the sweet twilight that, when it became darkness, was too cold to sit in; and the lamp lit in the little cabin—yawns—bed—the stirless sleep of nerves at peace and digestion in perfect order.

It was almost the same "outside" as in—not a cat's-paw squall molested us. There was sea enough for good sea-sailing, but not enough to wet me or my little house below—not till we got to Warrnambool, where, being weather-bound for a day or two, we had the joy of seeing great breakers again. They thundered on the rocky shore like cannons going off; they flung foam over the break-water; they would not let the Flinders come in. We sat on a brown boulder a whole morning and a whole afternoon to look at and listen to them, as one would listen to some archangel of a Paderewski.

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Ah me, how happy we were! The second honeymoon, like the second wedding-day, was miles better than the first. We married for love, if two people ever did, not having fifty pounds between us, but my old bridegroom was a truer lover than my young one. He said the same of his old bride. We were like travellers that have climbed to a noble mountain-top and sit down to rest and survey the arduous road by which they came—all rosy in the bloom of sunset—and the poor things still struggling up, not seeing what they head for. I never had such a rest in my life before, and we had never, in all our twenty-five years of dear companionship, been at such perfect peace together. There was only one little cloud, and that passed in a moment. Tom said—it was a mere thoughtless jest, for he did not mean to be unkind—that our divine tranquillity was due to there being no person near for me to be jealous of. I ought to have laughed at such an obviously absurd remark, but I am dreadfully sensitive to anything like injustice, and was foolish enough to feel hurt

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that he could say such a thing, even in fun. *I* jealous! I may have my faults—nobody is perfect in this world—but at least I cannot be justly accused of condescending to petty ones of that sort.

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CHAPTER IX.

GRANDMAMMA.

"GOOD-MORNING, Grandmamma!"

I was in my kitchen after breakfast, seeing about the dinner—calmly slicing French beans, because it was Monday morning and Jane was helping the washwoman—when I was suddenly accosted in this extraordinary way. With a jump that might have caused me to cut my fingers, I turned my head, and there in the doorway stood my son-in-law, Edmund Juke, panting from his bicycle, and grinning idiotically, as if he had said something very funny. By what he had said, and by the expression of his face, and by seeing him miles away from his consulting-room at that hour of the day, I knew, of course, what had happened. My heart was in my mouth.

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"What—what—you don't say—not really?" I gasped, scattering the beans, cut and uncut, together about the floor as I sprang to meet him. "Why, it isn't nearly time yet!"

"Oh yes, it is," said he. "Everything is all right. The finest boy you ever saw, and she doing as well as possible. I would not let any one but myself bring you the good news, Mater dear"—and here he kissed me, more affectionately than usual—"ill as I could spare the time. I knew you'd be easier in your mind, too——"

"But I am *not* easy in my mind," I broke in, excessively concerned about my child, and beginning to see that I had not been fairly treated in the matter. "I am quite sure it is premature, whatever you may say. Phyllis distinctly gave me to understand that it was a month off, at least. Otherwise should I be here?"

"It is an easy thing to make mistakes about, as you know. I can assure you there is nothing wrong in any way. You must allow

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a medical man—two medical men, for Errington attended her—to be the judge of that," said he, with the airs a young doctor gives himself when he has begun to make a name.

I was indeed thankful to hear him say so, but still I could not quite understand it. I wondered if it were possible—but no, it could not be! The cruel suspicion having entered my mind, however, I felt obliged to speak of it.

"I am not to suppose, am I, that Phyllis *wished* to deceive her own mother—and on such a point?"

Edmund at once replied, stormily, that I was certainly not to suppose any such preposterous thing; but he protested over much, I thought, and grew red in the face as he did so. I thought it not improbable that *he* had suggested my being put off the scent—he, who seemed to have known just when the baby was to be expected; afterwards I was sure of it. My own dear girl would have been incapable of such an idea.

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I asked Edmund the hour at which the event had taken place. He said at a little before three that morning. It was now between nine and ten—as I pointed out. He said they had all been glad of a little sleep after their excitement, and that he had come as soon as he could get away. He had also ridden at racing pace, averaging I don't know how many miles an hour. No, the buggy would not have been quicker, even with a pair, and he had wanted his wheel for refreshment and exercise. Of course he could not take me back on it, but there was no hurry about that. He had left Phyllis sleeping as soundly as a top, and the longer she was undisturbed the better.

"Certainly," I said, with rigid face and shaking heart. "And it is right that I should be there to see that she is undisturbed. I ought to have been there *hours* ago, Edmund, and I can't *think* why you did not send for me—her own mother—the very *first* person who should have been informed."

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He began to make all sorts of lame excuses.

"You see, Mater dear, the telegraph offices are not open on Sundays."

"Was it Sunday? So long ago as yesterday? And where were the buggy and the bicycle—not to speak of the trains?"

"The buggy and the bicycle were there, but I had to send the groom hunting for Errington, and of course I could not leave her myself. There was not a soul to take a message to you, Mater dear. Besides, there was no earthly use in giving you an upset for nothing. We soon saw that everything was going on beautifully—otherwise, of *course*, you would have been fetched at once—and so we thought you might as well be spared all the worry—you would have worried frightfully, you know—and that we would give you a pleasant surprise when it was all over. And now you don't seem half grateful to us for being so thoughtful about you."

He laughed at this poor joke. I could not laugh. My heart was too full.

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"Poor, poor, *poor* girl!" I passionately exclaimed. "To face that trial for the first time—terrified to death, naturally——"

"Oh dear, no," he interposed, in his flippant way. "I am proud to inform you that Phyllis conducted herself like a perfect lady. She was as calm as possible."

"How can you tell how calm she was?" I thundered at him. "You know nothing about it, though you are a doctor. *I* know—I know what she had to go through! And no one near her to help her with a word of comfort, except a hired person—one of your precious hospital nurses that are mere iron-nerved machines—women who might as well be men for all the feelings they've got!"

"But she had—she had," cried Edmund, hastily. "She had my mother near her—one of the kindest old souls that ever breathed."

"*What?*"

I stared at him, petrified with astonishment and indignation. *His* mother assisting at the confinement of *my* daughter! And *I*

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shut out! I could not believe it for the moment—that they would deliberately put such an insult upon me.

Edmund said it was not done deliberately, but was a pure accident. "It just happened," he said, "that she chanced to be in the house yesterday. She came in after morning church, as she often does, and seeing that something was up——"

"What—as early as yesterday morning!" I burst out, thoroughly and justifiably angry now, and not caring to hide it. "You mean to say Phyllis was taken ill in the *morning*, Edmund, and you did not let me know? Oh, this is too much!"

Of course he hastened to excuse himself —with what I feel sure, though I am sorry to say it, was a barefaced lie. He declared she was not taken ill in the morning—not until quite late in the day—but that she was a little restless and nervous, and his mother had stayed to cheer her.

"Mother is such a bright, calm-minded, capable old body," he said—as if I were a

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dull, hysterical fool—" and she has had such swarms upon swarms of children, and such oceans of sick-nursing, and Phyllis is so fond of her, and as you were not get-at-able, Mater dear——"

Oh, it was sickening! I hadn't patience to listen to him, with his " Mater dears " and his hypocritical pretences. I saw clearly that it had been what Harry would call a put-up thing; he had preferred old Mrs. Juke—a woman of no education, with a figure like a sack of flour tied round the middle—to me. I suppose his friends had been twitting him about the tyrannical mother-in-law, in the vulgar conventional way; or he had been afraid that I would dispute his authority and orders in the sick-room; or perhaps, to do him justice—he had thought nothing of an affair which was in his daily experience, although it was his own wife concerned. In any case, I was sure that Phyllis had not been to blame. However fond she might be of Mrs. Juke—and probably she feigned affection to some extent, for her husband's sake

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—it was her own mother she would long for at such a time. And her mother she should have, or I'd know the reason why.

"It is not my fault that I was un-get-at-able yesterday," I said to Edmund, quietly but firmly. "At any rate I am get-at-able now. I see you are in a fidget to be after your patients—go, my dear, and tell her I will be with her in an hour or two. Oh, I daresay there *is* no hurry—from your point of view; I am of a different opinion. I am a woman—*and* a mother; I understand these things. You don't—and never could—not if you were fifty times a doctor."

"All right," he returned cheerfully, or with assumed cheerfulness. "I am sure she will be delighted to see you. Only we shall have to keep her very quiet for the next few days—not let her talk and argue and excite herself, you know——"

I laughed—I could not help it—and waved him off. I told him to get himself some beer, or whatever he fancied, and not to suppose that he could teach me mother's

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duties at my time of life. And in a few minutes he went flying back to town, and I sought my dear husband, where he was busy digging in the vegetable garden, and flung myself weeping into his grubby arms.

Tom, too, was quite overcome. Not nearly so surprised as I expected him to be, but tremulous in his agitation, and almost speechless at first. For a tough old sailor as he is, he has the softest heart I know.

"My little girl!" he murmured huskily, and cleared his throat again and again. "And it was only the other day that she was a baby herself. Makes us feel very ancient, don't it?"

"*No*," I returned emphatically. "I don't feel ancient in the *very* least. And you, my dear, are in your prime. It is simply an absurdity that we should be grandparents."

"Well, it does seem rather ridiculous in your case," he rejoined—my sweet old fellow!—"with your brown hair and bright eyes and figure straight as a dart. But I——"

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"But you," I insisted, "are just as handsome as ever you were—worth a dozen priggish little whipper-snappers like Edmund Juke."

"Oh! What has Edmund Juke been doing?"

"He let her be ill yesterday—*all* yesterday—and never sent for me to be with her!" I sobbed, feeling sure of sympathy here, if nowhere else. "Did you ever know of a mother being treated so before?"

But Tom—even Tom—was unsympathetic and disappointing. He did not exclaim and protest on my behalf—did not seem to see how unnatural it was, and what a slight had been put upon me—but just patted my shoulder and stroked my hair, as if I were a mere fretful child.

"If you ask me," he said, when I pressed him to speak his mind, "I must say that I think they showed their sense, Polly. And it's a great relief to me, my dear, on your account. You are so highly strung, pet, that you can't stand things like other people.

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You'd have been worse than Phyllis. Whereas a placid old Gamp like Mother Juke——"

"*Tom!*" I broke in sharply. "*Who* told you that Mother Juke was there?"

"Nobody," said he, with a disconcerted look. "I only thought it likely that she might be. Was she not?"

"She was. But I want to know why you concluded that she was, when I had not mentioned the fact?"

"I didn't conclude it. I only knew that she was keeping an eye on the child, being so experienced, and living so handy."

"How did you know?"

"Ted told me—in a casual way—a good bit ago—I forget exactly when——"

"Tom——"

But Tom pulled out his watch hastily, plainly anxious to avoid the corner he felt himself being pushed into.

"Look here, Polly, if you want to catch that train, and have to pack your bag before you start, there's not a minute to lose. Now that she knows you know, she'll be looking

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out for you—wanting to show her baby to her mother, bless her little heart! And a fine boy too. I'm glad the first is a boy—though I'm sure I don't know why I should be, for the girls are far and away the best, to my thinking—girls that grow up to be good and pretty women, treasures to the lucky men who get them—like you."

Silly fellow! But he means it all. There are no empty pretences about Tom. To him there is one perfect being in the world, and that's his wife. It comforted me to feel that I was appreciated in one quarter, whatever I might be in others, and the mention of the baby made me forget everything but my longing to have him in my arms.

"I will go at once," I said, "and you must come too, dearest. You must support me against the Juke faction. You must see that your child's mother has her rights."

"Oh, rights be blowed!" he replied, rather rudely. "There's nobody will dream of disputing them. You don't know what a humble-minded, unselfish, dear old soul that

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mother of Ted's is; she wouldn't deny the rights of a sucking-pig—let alone an important person like you."

"Your mind is always running on pigs," I laughed. "And I am sure that old creature is just like a great sow fattened up for the Agricultural Show. She grunts as she walks—if you can call it walking—and you almost want bullocks to get her out of an armchair when she has once sunk into it."

"Well, that isn't her fault," Tom commented, grave as a judge.

"Of course it isn't," I acquiesced. "She is getting into years now."

"So are we all."

"Yes. But she is fifteen years older than I am, if she's a day."

"Fifteen years'll fly over *us* before we know it, Polly. And then *you* won't like to be crowed over, I'll bet."

"Who's crowing? I merely state a fact. She is."

"Then all the more reason why you should be grateful to her."

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"Grateful to her for usurping my rights——"

"Nonsense!"

He had one of his short moods on him, when it is better not to argue with him. Besides, there was no time for argument. He led the way to the house, pulling down his shirt-sleeves. He said he would have a wash and put on his coat and take me to Phyllis's house, and see the baby if allowed to do so; but he would not promise to stay more than a few minutes. He did not want, he said, to put them about, when already they had so much to attend to. Talk of humble-mindedness! His humble-mindedness makes me want to shake him sometimes. Off the sea he seemed to forget that he was a commander—a character that Nature intended him to maintain, wherever he was. One had but to look at him to see that.

I had to make so many preparations for his comfort and for the proper safe-guarding of Lily in my absence, which I supposed likely to run into a week or two, that it was noon

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before I could be ready to set forth. So I yielded to Tom's suggestion that we should have our usual one o'clock dinner before starting, and drive ourselves to town in the afternoon. He wanted to take in the buggy for stores. He could see me "comfortably settled," he said, and do his necessary business at the same time.

Alas! How little we anticipated the circumstances of the return journey! No one could have been happier than I, as I sat beside him behind our fast-trotting Parson—we called him Parson because of his peculiar rusty-black colour and a white mark on his chest—talking of the grandchild we were going to see, and all the family affairs involved in his arrival. It never crossed our minds for a moment that he was bringing, not peace, but a sword.

In our excess of considerateness we drove to livery stables, and there put up our trap; then we walked quietly to Phyllis's house, and Tom slunk away somewhere, like a rat into a hole, as soon as we were admitted. His anxi-

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ety to be "out of the road" was really undignified. Of course I made straight for my daughter's room.

The large dining-room was full of waiting patients; I counted three women and a child as I passed up the hall. Whatever Edmund's faults, he is one of the cleverest and most sought after doctors in Melbourne. I have heard Mary Welshman and others boasting about Fitzherbert, and Groom, and Sewell, and the rest, but not one of them is to be named in the same day with my son-in-law. Phyllis was obliged to use a little room on the first floor for meals, on account of the lower part of the house being so overrun; and the poor parlourmaid spent her entire time in answering the door.

Creeping upstairs, with my noiseless, sick-room step, I met old Mother Juke, as Tom calls her, lumping down, with the gait of a rheumatic elephant. She seemed to shake the very street. How my poor child could stand such a woman about her, at such a time, I could not imagine; it would have driven me

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into a fever. Of course she is kind and well-meaning enough—she can't help her age and her physical infirmities—I know that. And it is quite true that she has been a great nurse in her day. But her day is past.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Juke," I said pleasantly, as we met and paused on a little landing at the turn of the stairs, "you are here early."

Scarcely had I opened my mouth when the mountain fell on me, as it were; the old thing put her huge arms about my neck and kissed me. I have always objected to being slobbered over by comparative strangers, and I did not return the kiss; nevertheless I treated her with the courtesy that I felt due to my son-in-law's mother.

"And so," I said, smiling, "you have all been conspiring together to steal a march on me! You have been jumping my claim, as the miners say—defrauding a poor woman of her natural rights."

"Nothing of the sort, my dear," she replied, in her fat voice—and if there is one

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thing that I dislike more than another is to be "my-deared" in this promiscuous fashion. "You were best out of it, with your feeling heart. It would only have upset you, my dear, and that would have upset her; and then Ted would have been in a way, and Captain Braye would have blamed us. I am sure *he* is grateful, if nobody else is."

"He is nothing of the sort," I cried, flaming. "My husband is perfectly astounded at the way I have been shut out. He never heard of such a thing as a mother being set aside at such a time."

She was at a loss for an answer to this, so fell back upon praises of the baby and of Phyllis's satisfactory condition. There was nothing, she said, that could give me the faintest cause for uneasiness, nor had been from the first—nor would be, provided she were kept quiet and free from all excitement. And we ought to be humbly thankful that this was so—to feel nothing but joy that she had done so excellently, and that the child was so strong and beautiful.

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"That is all very well," I remarked. "But that is not the point. What I want to know is—and I intend to have an answer—whose doing it was that I was not sent for yesterday morning?—that I was kept in utter ignorance of the most important event that has ever occurred in my family—when, for all you people did to prevent it, my daughter might have died without my seeing her again!"

We were now in the little first-floor sitting-room, just off the stairs. It was between three and four, and the luncheon things were not cleared away. Indeed the house seemed completely disorganised, having no one to look after it. Old Mrs. Juke, who did not seem to notice this, stood just within the door, puffing like a porpoise, and trying to look dignified, which was quite impossible.

"I am very sorry you take it in this way," she said, in a hoity-toity tone. "We may have made a mistake, but, if we did, we made it with the best intentions. All we thought of

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was to save you useless pain. We knew your nervous, anxious temperament, and how keenly you feel anything affecting your children; and so we decided——"

"It was not a matter for you to decide," I broke in, with natural asperity. "I am neither a baby nor an idiot. I have at least as much sense as any one in this house—I should be sorry for myself, indeed, if I had not—and I prefer to attend to my own business, if it's all the same to you. Whether I should be here, or whether I should not, was for *me* to say—for me and for my daughter. She, I am very certain, had no part in shutting me out; and she ought to have been considered, if I was not."

"It was she," said Mrs. Juke, "who wished it most. Her one desire was to spare you."

"I don't believe it."

"I am sorry if you don't believe it." The old thing shook like blancmange in hot weather. "I can only say that it is perfectly true."

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"I will ask her if it is true—that she wished to have strangers with her in place of her own mother."

I started to cross the landing to Phyllis's room, and my teeth were set, and my heart was thumping with an emotion that I could scarcely control—but I need not say I did control it. Mrs. Juke hung on to me to stop me, pleading that Phyllis and the baby were fast asleep together, and must not be disturbed; and I asked her how she, who had been a mother fifteen times, could insult a mother by supposing that she would be less careful of a sick child than anybody else. If I had gone in alone I am sure she would not have heard me—Tom says that I walk about the house as if shod with feathers—but Mrs. Juke would come too, and there was no hushing that solid tread. I saw my darling start up from the pillow, frightened out of her sleep by the noise, and the flush come into her cheeks. And Mrs. Juke cried "There!" reproachfully, as if it had been my fault.

At the same moment another stranger

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came out of Edmund's dressing-room, and turned upon me like a perfect fury.

"I must ask you, madam, to be so good as to be quiet," she said. "The doctor's orders are——"

But I did not wait to be told by her what the doctor's orders were; I simply took her by the shoulders, ran her back into the dressing-room, and locked the door upon her. If Edmund's mother liked to be rude to me, she could, but I was not going to take impudence from a hospital nurse. I cannot understand the passion young doctors have for those conceited, overbearing women. This creature was not even married. What, I wonder, would *my* mother have thought of a single woman attending a lady in her confinement? I call it scandalous.

When I had got rid of her, I requested Mrs. Juke to retire also, which she did. I apologised to her if I had said anything that seemed discourteous in the heat of the moment, for there was a watery look about her eyes as if she were feeling rather hurt; and I

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said to her in a gentle way, that, if she would only for one instant imagine herself in my place, she could not help admitting that I was more than justified. I suggested that it would be a kindness to us if she would see what the servants were about, judging from appearances, they were entirely neglecting their duties. I mentioned the state of the lunch-table, and Phyllis broke in to explain that Ted had begun work so late that he had not yet found time to come up for anything to eat.

"Never you mind," I said to her, soothing her. "*You* are not to trouble your little head about these matters. I am here, darling, and you can rest from all housekeeping worries now."

And so at last I had my treasure to myself. She was very fluttery, and cried a little —which I did not wonder at—but soon composed herself, and proudly displayed the little one cuddled to her dear breast under the bedclothes. He was a lovely baby (and at this time of writing is the most beautiful boy you ever saw—the image of me, Tom says); and

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I felt, when I took him into my arms, as if my own happy young mother-days had come over again.

"Now, Phyllis dear," I said to her, as I laid him back into his nest, "I don't want to bother or disturb you in the slightest degree, but I *do* want to know whether it was your wish, as Mrs. Juke declares it was——"

However, before I could get the question out, or she could answer, the door opened; and there stood the nurse, looking at me with her nasty, hard eyes, as if I were some venemous reptile; and Errington was behind her. She had actually been to fetch him—he lived almost next door—in her rage with me for having had the firmness to keep her in her place. He was one of these modern young doctors who swear by the new ways, and of course he believed her tales and took her part against me.

"Mrs. Braye," he began, trying to be very professional and superior, "I must beg of you to leave my patient's room. The nurse has my orders not to allow her to talk or to be

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agitated in any way. I do not wish her to see people at present."

"I will take care," I answered, with dignity, "that she does not see people."

"Excuse me—she is seeing people now."

"I suppose you are not aware," I said, very quietly, "that I am your patient's mother? It seems to be taken for granted in this house that such a person does not exist."

"I am aware of it," he was good enough to admit; "I recognise the fact, Mrs. Braye, and sympathise with your feelings, believe me. But, if you will allow me to say so, you are so excitable—you have such a quick, nervous temperament——"

"And who has dared to discuss my temperament with you?" I demanded furiously —for this was the last straw—an utter stranger, a boy young enough to have been my son! "Where is Dr. Juke? I will ask *him* to explain. Mrs. Juke"—she was lurking in the passage outside—"will you be kind enough to send Edmund to me? After all, he is the medical authority here."

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Edmund came hurrying up, and I never saw a man look so much like a whipped dog. He had not the courage of a mouse in the presence of his colleague. He spread out his hands with a helpless air—said we were all under Errington's orders, and that he no longer had a say in anything—in short, left me undefended to be a laughingstock to those people.

I flew downstairs to find Tom, whom I had left in a little office behind the consulting-room, waiting until I summoned him to see the baby. I knew what he would think of the way I was being treated, and how he would vindicate and uphold me. But here I was again frustrated. The aroma of his strong tobacco was in the air; the ashes from his pipe were still hot in the tray; but he had vanished. Rushing back into the hall, I collided with that pert little parlourmaid who answers the door. She had come to tell me, she said, with an ill-disguised smirk, that Captain Braye had gone to do some business in the town and would return in the course of an

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hour or two. She must have seen that something was the matter, but she was just as callous as the rest of them.

I said "Very well," as cheerfully as I could, and sought the only refuge I knew of —the drawing-room on the first floor. It was dark with drawn blinds and the tree ferns on the balcony, but not so dark that I could not see the thick dust on everything; and there were flowers in the vases that literally stank with decay and the bad water their stalks were rotting in. Feeling sure that I was safe in this deserted and neglected place, I closed the door behind me, sank upon a sofa, took out my pocket-handkerchief, and had a good cry. Any mother, hurt to the heart as I had been, would have done the same.

And while I was in the middle of it I heard a gentle creak, and the rustle of a soft gown, and a step like velvet on the carpet— Edmund would have a Brussels carpet, instead of the polished boards and rugs that I advised. Looking up, alarmed and ashamed, whom should I see but dear little Emily Blount,

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with her kind, sweet face, full of the love and sympathy that I was so much in need of. I had always known that she was one in a thousand, but never had I felt so thankful that my Harry had made so wise a choice. She had stolen away from her school to hear how Phyllis was, and, instead of pushing in where she was not wanted, had crept like a mouse to the empty drawing-room, to wait there until she could intercept somebody going up or down the stairs. What an example of good feeling, of good manners, of good breeding and good taste! I held out my arms to her, and she ran to them, and kissed and hugged me, crying out to know what was the matter, in the utmost concern.

Well, I told her what was the matter—I told her everything; I had to relieve my overcharged feelings in some way, and, Tom being absent, I could not have found a truer sympathiser. Words cannot express the comfort it was to me to know that she would be my real daughter some day.

"Emmie," I said to her, as she sat beside

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me with her arm round my waist, "promise me that, when *you* have a baby, you will send for me to be with you—and send for me *in time*."

She blushed perfectly scarlet—which was silly of her, being a B. A., and of course not like the ordinary ignorant bread-and-butter miss—but she laid her little face into my neck in the most tender, confiding way.

"It is what I should wish," she whispered, "if only my own dear mother would not think——"

"Your own mother," I broke in, "has only had you, and I have had four children. I know much more of those matters than she does, and *you* know from experience, having been in the house all through Harry's illness, what a good nurse I am." I had seen Mrs. Blount once or twice—a sharp little fidgety woman, who would get dreadfully on the nerves of an invalid who was at all sensitive. "Besides," I added, "own mothers as a rule are a mistake on these occasions. They are

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over-anxious, and the personal interest is too strong."

"Oh, I think so—I do think so," she said, agreeing with me at once. "It is too hard upon them both, unless they are cold-hearted creatures. And I would much, much rather have you, dearest Mrs. Braye, if I am ever so happy—so fortunate——"

"As you will be," I broke in, warmly embracing her. "I am going to talk to Harry about that little house which he has fallen in love with. I don't believe in young people wasting the best years of their lives in waiting for each other."

We had a nice talk, and I told her how well Phyllis was doing—wonderful as it was, when one considered the mismanagement that prevailed—and described the beauty of the baby. Emily said she was satisfied, having such a report on my authority, and stole away as she had come, with no noise or fuss. I wanted her to stay with me until Tom returned, but she pleaded her duties, and I am not the one to dissuade in such a case. When

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she was gone I sat alone for a few minutes, calmed and braced, thinking what I should do; then I heard a step, and Edmund came in.

"Oh, *here* you are!" he exclaimed, with forced hilarity. "I've been hunting for you everywhere. Look here, Mater dear, I'm so awfully sorry——"

But I was prepared for these counterfeit apologies, which had no sorrow in them. I cut him short by inquiring mildly whether Captain Braye was in the house.

"Not yet—he's not back yet—he will be soon. But look here, Mrs. Braye, honestly, I wouldn't have had it happen for a thousand pounds."

"Then may I ask you, Edmund, kindly to have my portmanteau sent to the stables? I will join my husband there."

"No, no," he urged, in a great fluster. "You are not going to leave us. We sha'n't let you. Your portmanteau is gone to the spare room. You will stay with Phyllis and the baby, and my mother

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will go. She is putting her things on now."

"Then go and stop her *instantly*," I cried. "What! Do you suppose I want her to be slighted and humiliated because I am? Do you want to set it about everywhere that I turned your mother out of her own son's house? I have no place here, Edmund—I had forgotten it for the moment, but I shall not forget it again; she has. Go at once and tell her that, if she doesn't stay, Phyllis will have no one."

"And why can't you both stay?" he demanded foolishly.

"My dear boy," I laughed, "if you think that possible, after what I have just experienced, you must have a very queer opinion of me. I am not proud, nor prone to take offence, but one must draw the line somewhere. Two perfect strangers have turned me out of my daughter's room and insulted me before my daughter's face, apparently with your approval. I wonder what the captain will think when he hears of it? It will rather astonish

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him, I fancy. Even if I consented to expose myself to further treatment of the kind, I am quite sure he would not. But I am not the person to force myself where I am not wanted, Edmund; you ought to know that by this time."

And yet I pined to stay. And when he pleaded that they had all done for the best, according to their lights, and tried to persuade me that the entire household, including Phyllis, was overwhelmed with grief because I was offended, I wondered whether I could, with any justice to myself and Tom, pocket the indignities that I had received. I said to my son-in-law—

"Let us understand each other. When you ask me to remain, do you contemplate keeping on that nurse who was so insolent to me?"

"Oh," said he, "I don't think she meant to be insolent. She's a first-class nurse. Very strict ideas about duty, but that's a fault on the right side, isn't it? Errington got her for us, and as he's attending Phyllis——"

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"He would still go on attending Phyllis, I suppose?"

"Oh, I suppose so. Why not?"

"No reason why not, of course, if you wish it. Only you can hardly blame me if I prefer not to meet either of them again. Good-bye, Edmund. I have a little shopping to do. And I hope," I burst out, breaking from him and running down the stairs, "I hope that when your children grow up, they won't cast you off in your old age as mine have done."

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CHAPTER X.

VINDICATED.

NATURALLY, I did not see much of the Juke household after the affair of the baby's birth. There is nothing so sad, and so disgraceful to the parties concerned, as discord in families; but this was no vulgar quarrel, although several officious busybodies regarded it as such. I merely took the very broad hint that my son-in-law and his mother had given me, to the effect that Phyllis by her marriage had passed into their possession and no more belonged to me. Moreover, one must have *some* self-respect, as I represented to Tom, who either could not or would not recognise the facts of the case, remaining stupidly impervious to arguments that would have convinced a child; and a proper sense of dignity is an element of good breeding which I have

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inherited with my blood—fortunately or otherwise, as the case may be.

But I was just as anxious, and even more so, to be assured that all was well. *My* feelings towards my own kith and kin can know no change. Therefore I sent Tom to Melbourne every morning to make inquiries. Perhaps he would have gone in any case, for his own satisfaction, but he was not the messenger I should have chosen had there been a choice. Unfortunately, he was the only one available. Without, I am sure, meaning to be disloyal to me, he would stay there half the day, smoke with Edmund, lunch with Mrs. Juke, pay Phyllis visits in her room, and generally allow himself to be cajolled into forgetting the actual state of things—making me cheap as well as himself, and putting me into a most false and ignominious position. And then he would come back laden with "best loves" and "when was I coming to see them again?" and "Baby was wondering what he had done to be deserted by his dear grandmamma," and rubbish of that sort,

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which any one but he must have seen was simply insulting under the circumstances, and which sometimes drove me wild. His weak amiability, in season and out of season, and his habit of taking everybody to be as good-natured as himself, made him incapable of perceiving that a gross outrage had been committed, for which formal apologies were due. I argued the matter with him for hours at a time, and had my labour for my pains; he would never positively admit that I was right, simply because he could not understand the point of view. The silence that gives consent was the most I got, and I was not satisfied with that—from him. And so we fell out rather frequently—we, who had never had a disagreement in our lives—and I was very unhappy.

Nevertheless, I was not going to set foot in Edmund Juke's house until proper reparation had been made. It was not for a woman of my years and standing to bow down to a boy and girl and an ignorant old person, who, I believe, began life in a baker's shop, or some

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such place. An apology I intended to have before I would receive them back to favour.

And they did not apologise. It seems to me a petty sort of thing not to frankly own it when one is in the wrong, but very few people are large-minded enough to apprehend the difference between false pride and true. As a rule, they think it derogatory to dignity—a "come-down" so to speak—to confess to being human and therefore liable to error; whereas you cannot have a better proof of moral superiority. Edmund and Phyllis were no exceptions to this rule. They would do anything short of the one thing they should have done. When the time came for the baby to be baptized, they wrote a joint letter, couched in extravagantly affectionate terms, asking me to be his godmother. It was the dearest wish of their hearts, they would have me believe; and yet—not a word of regret for what they had made me suffer!

I saw through it at once. They were merely throwing a sop to Cerberus, as it were, expecting that the little compliment would

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pacify me—treating me as a cross child to be appeased with lollipops. Tom was angry when I expressed my views; he said—what I am sure he was very sorry for afterwards—that I was "the most perverse woman that ever walked;" and it really seemed at one time as if this miserable affair was destined to wreck the happiness of a marriage which for more than a quarter of a century had been the most perfect in the world. I had never imagined it possible that *my* husband could be morose and rude—and to me, of all people!

I answered the letter the same day. I said I was much obliged to Edmund and Phyllis for their kind invitation, but I considered I was too old to stand sponsor to the baby, who should have some one likely to be of use to him through life. I did not suggest Mrs. Juke as a substitute; I did not even mention her, nor refer to my grievances; I wrote temperately and courteously, though not gushingly, and I fully expected that my note would bring forth another, urging me to reconsider the matter, and assuring me that I was not too

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old for anything—as of course I am not. Instead of this, they affected to be huffy, made no rejoinder, and took no further notice of me. So my feelings can be imagined when Lily calmly informed me that *she* was to be the baby's godmother. I was keeping the child closely at home, engaged with her studies; I had put a stop to the Melbourne visits, because I do not believe in town life for a girl so young, and it was just as easy and very little more expensive to have her masters come out to give her lessons; therefore I could not imagine how she had been, as Harry would have said, "got at."

"Oh, are you?" I ejaculated, dissembling my surprise, "and, pray, who says so?"

"Father," she replied. "Ted spoke to father, and he said I might. And they want father to be godfather—Mr. Stephen Juke and either father or Harry—and Harry says his conscience is against something or other in the baptismal service—and so is Emily's—and that's why they chose me. And oh, mother, I must! I MUST!"

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She said it as if it were "I will," and with that mulish look which I knew of old, and which meant that she would fight to the death to get her own way, no matter whose feelings might be trampled on. I did not stay to argue with her, but flew down the garden to find Tom. He was pitchforking clean straw into the pigsties, and when he saw me, stood and leaned on the fork handle with an exaggerated air of resignation. "Well, and what's the matter now?" was expressed in his face and attitude, though he did not speak.

"Tom," I demanded, as I paused before him—I will not deny that I was boiling over —"Tom, are you going to be godfather to the Jukes' baby?"

"I don't know, Polly," he said evasively. "Nothing is settled yet."

"If you do," I declared with passion, "I will never speak to you again."

Of *course* I did not mean that, but he took it as if I had said something horrible. Never did I expect to see my husband look at me as he looked then, or to hear him speak to

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me in a tone so cold and cruel, or call me names as if he were a common costermonger instead of the gentleman I had always found him.

"Polly," he said, "because you are behaving like a maniac, am I to do so too?—to turn against my daughter for nothing at all—my dear, good child, who never grieved me in her life—and at this time of all times, when her little heart is full——"

I could bear no more. I burst into tears. I believe the boy was digging potatoes not twenty yards away, but I did not care; in the middle of Collins Street I must have done the same. To be misunderstood by the whole world was a trifle indeed, but to be misunderstood by *him* an insupportable calamity.

It was but for a moment, after all. No sooner did he see my tears than he flung away his fork, hurried me behind a shed, and took me into his arms to comfort me, as he had always done. All piggy as he was, I threw mine around his neck, forgiving him

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everything for the sake of his constant love.

"There, there," he crooned, "don't cry, pet. What a baby it is, after all! You know as well as I do that you are just cutting off your nose to spite your face—now don't you, sweetheart?"

"Oh, Tom," I wailed, "if you would *only* understand!"

"Well, I do," he assured me, ruffling my hair with his grubby paw. "I know all about it, little woman. And I'm ready to do anything in the world to please you. I always am."

"Then you won't stand godfather to that child—without me?"

"Suppose we both stand together? We've done everything together so far."

"I can't. I have refused."

"Then write and say you have changed your mind."

"It's too late. And they don't want me to change it, Tom—they don't indeed; they only asked me out of politeness; they did not

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press me the least little bit. I am sure they were delighted when I declined. They had calculated upon it."

"Pooh! That's your imagination."

"It is *not*. What, are you going to accuse me of not speaking the truth?"

"No, no, my dear; but sometimes—well, never mind; we are all liable to make mistakes. And when I think of the letter they wrote, asking you—and I'm sure they meant it——"

"They could not have meant it, because when I only half declined—I left it open to them to ask again—they would not take the hint. Oh, they don't want me for anything now, and I would die sooner than ever force myself on them again!"

Tom inquired, in a grave tone, what I had said in my letter—what reason I had given for declining, or half-declining, in the first instance; and I told him.

"And, dear," I urged, "if I am too old—and they accepted that as a valid excuse—what are you?"

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"Hm-m," he mused. "I never thought of that. Harry's the man—not me—if there's anything in being godfather beyond the name. Only Harry jibs at saying 'I will' and 'all this I steadfastly believe'—as if it were for a young donkey like him to criticise the Prayer Book that's been good enough for generations of us. That boy's head is full of maggots. So's Emily's."

"I beg," said I, "that you will not say a word against Emily, nor Harry either. They are perfectly right. I think their loyalty beautiful."

"To whom?" asked Tom.

"To me," I said. "Was it likely they would stand sponsors to the baby over my head? No, they love me too well to countenance anything that would humiliate me. And Tom, my dear, I think it downright tyranny to keep those two dear children hanging on as they are doing, wasting their best years. You forget that I was barely twenty when you married me."

"Barely twenty-two," he corrected.

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"And Emily is twenty-three. You might remember what it was to *us* to get each other and our little home—how *we* should have felt if cruel fathers had kept us out of it!"

"Well, I never thought to hear myself called a cruel father," laughed Tom, taking everything literally, as usual. "And as for Hal and Emily—why, you yourself——"

"I did nothing of the sort," I broke in—for I knew what he was going to say—"and I have always advocated early marriages, because our own was so successful. Now, Tom, when we have settled the affair of the christening—but we must do that first——"

"And how's it to be done?" he sighed, heavily. "Good God! I've been true-blue Church and State all my life, but I'm hanged if I don't wish there were no such things as christenings!"

I am sure I heartily agreed with him.

And after all he had his wish, as far as our baby was concerned. That christening was postponed indefinitely. I heard that Edmund

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had said, with a man's obtuseness to the logic of the case, that it was better the child should remain a technical sinner than that all its relations should become real ones. I was greatly surprised at the decision, but if they chose to make the poor infant suffer for their faults, it was no concern of mine. Mary Welshman and her husband wanted to make out that it was—this, however, was merely a bit of revenge for some strictures I had passed upon that disreputable brother of hers—and they took upon themselves to such an extent that I resigned my sitting in the church and stopped all my subscriptions. Welshman said that if baby died unbaptized and unregenerate, his eternal damnation would lie at my door—or something to that effect. I was not going to sit under a clergyman who presumed to behave to me in that way.

And so, thanks to all this meddling and muddling, the miserable affair ended in a complete estrangement between my daughter and me. She never came out to see us, as she had been used to do, and of course I did not go to

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see her without being asked. I would not let Lily go either, to have her taught to be disrespectful to her mother; and the child—too young to know what was for her good—tried me sorely with her rebellious spirit. She was worse than rebellious—she was disobedient and deceitful; I found that she met her sister secretly when my back was turned, and that she knew when little Eddie cut his first tooth, and when he was short-coated, though I did not. Tom was mopey and grumpy, almost sulky sometimes—so changed that I hardly knew him for my sunny-tempered mate; he seemed all at once to be turning into an old man. And I, though I tried to fight against it, had a perpetual ache in my heart, and was tempted sometimes to wish that I was dead, so that I might be loved once more.

What I should have done without Emily I don't know. Tom gave me permission to make certain arrangements which would enable her and Harry to marry and settle, and the excitement and occupation which this entailed just kept me, I think, from going out of

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my mind with melancholy. As it was near the midwinter vacation, I insisted on the dear girl giving up her school at the end of term; and we fixed a day in August for the wedding, so as to have the cream of springtime for the honeymoon. Emily's father—a perfect gentleman—was a cripple, earning but a small income by law-writing at home, and their house in Richmond was cramped and close; for health's sake I made her spend part of the holidays with me, and really it was like the happy old times over again to see her sweet, bright face about the house. Her companionship was most beneficial to Lily, too; the child recovered all her amiability, and was as good as gold. Tom quite brightened up, laughing and joking, like his old self; and we had Harry rushing out upon his bicycle directly his office closed, and staying to sleep night after night, so as to get long evenings with his betrothed. I never saw a pair of lovers behave with better taste. Instead of hiding themselves in an empty room for hours, they would play a rubber of whist with the old folks, and

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Emily would sing our favourite songs to us, and duets with Lily; and Harry was like a big boy again with his "Mummie" and his "Mater" and his many pranks. It was delicious to wake in the night and think of him back in the family nest—to picture him as he had looked when I went in to tuck him up, turning his handsome head to kiss his mother. It was a good time altogether—except for the one thing; *that* spoiled all—for me, at any rate, if not for the others.

Every day, and nearly all day long, Emily and I busied ourselves preparing the new house. The dears had wished to live in our neighbourhood, like the devoted children that they were, and had fallen in love with a sweet little villa of half a dozen rooms, in a neat, small garden, which was the ideal home for a bride and bridegroom of large refinement and small means. It was a Boom property going cheap, and Tom and I stretched a point to buy it outright and make them a present of it; so that I could look forward to having my dear daughter-in-law near me for many years

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to come. Such proximity might have been inconvenient in the case of another person, but I had no fear of the old prejudice against mothers-in-law operating here.

The drawing-room, furnished entirely to my own design, was a picture. We had the floor stained and rugs spread about; as Emily said, that was one of the charms of living out of streets, which, however well-watered, continually covered your things with dust, as if the house had pores to take it in by. In town, if you want polished surfaces, you must simply live with a duster in your hand. Then we papered the walls yellow and painted the woodwork cream; and we made delightful chintz curtains and covers for inexpensive furniture, and got a handy carpenter to carry out our ideas for overmantel and bookcases, and used I don't know how many tins of Aspinall. Without going into further particulars, I may say that it was the prettiest little home that can be imagined when all was done. Emily was only too pleased to leave everything to my taste and judgment, and I

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cannot remember ever having a job that I enjoyed more thoroughly.

Then she had to go back to her mother to get her clothes ready. And, because I could not do without her altogether, I often joined her in town and had an hour's shopping or sewing with her. I accompanied her, of course, when she went to choose the wedding-gown—a walking costume of cloth and silk that would be useful to her afterwards—and on the following day I kept an appointment we had made to interview a dressmaker.

For the first time, she was not waiting for me. Her mother met me instead—a nice, superior sort of woman, quite different from Mrs. Juke—but a little inclined to be off-hand, even with me. I also detected in her manner a trace of that jealous spirit which above all things I abhor, especially in mothers, whose natural instinct it is to sacrifice and efface themselves for their children's good.

"Emily is out," she said. "You can't have her. You'll have to do as I mostly have to do—attend to your business alone."

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"But it is her business I am going to attend to—not my own," I said; "and I cannot possibly do it without her. It is entirely for her pleasure and convenience that I have come in to-day, Mrs. Blount, and she faithfully promised to be ready for me at three."

"Well, you see, sickness is not like anything else—it's got to come first. It's not an hour since she was sent for, and there was no way of getting a message to you. She told me to give you her love, and say how sorry she was."

"Will she be long, do you think?"

"I couldn't say; but she took her nightgown with her."

"Oh! Then I may as well go home at once. And when she wants me again, she can send me word." I was inclined to be annoyed with Emily for running me about for nothing, but—providentially—it occurred to me to inquire what her errand was.

"It's the child," said Mrs. Blount, "that's not very well."

"What child?"

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"The little Juke baby. He has only a cold, his mother thinks, but, as the doctor is away just now, she's nervous about him. So she sent for Emily."

"For *Emily!*" My heart swelled. I cannot describe the feeling that came over me. Mrs. Blount stared at me in an odd way, and I have no doubt had cause to do so; I must have stared at her like a daft creature. Neither of us spoke another word. I just turned and ran out of the house, ran all the way to the tram road, ran after a tram that had already passed the end of the street, and in a quarter of an hour was jumping from the dummy of another opposite my darling daughter's door. No doubt my fellow travellers smiled to see a matron of my years conducting herself in that manner, but I cast dignity to the winds. A new maid who did not know me answered my sharp pull at the house bell, and told me Mrs. Juke was not at home to visitors.

"How is the baby?" I gasped out, trembling in every limb.

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"We have just sent for Dr. Errington," she replied. And then I rushed past her and upstairs to Phyllis's room.

As soon as I opened the door, and heard the sound in the air, I recognised croup. It reminded me of times, in years gone by, when I had wakened in the night and wondered for a moment what the extraordinary noise was that pulsed through the house like the snoring of a wild animal, and then leaped from my bed in agony as if a sword had gone through me. I could see my own child's face, swollen and dark with threatened suffocation, looking to her mother for help with those beseeching eyes: just in the same way they looked at me now, only now the mother-anguish was wringing *her* poor heart. She was walking up and down the floor distractedly, with the baby in her arms—he had grown a huge fellow, and weighed her down; and Emily was wildly turning the leaves of a great medical book of Edmund's, blind with tears. Dear, loving, futile creatures! It was more than I could bear to see them, and to

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hear my Phyllis cry, "Mother! Mother! Oh, mother, tell us what to do!"

In one moment my cloak was on the floor and the babe was in my arms. He struggled to cry, but could not get the sound out—only the brazen crow, and harsh, strangled breath, which, I was informed, were symptoms of a crisis which had only just appeared, attacking him in his sleep—and Phyllis, when she had given him to me, clasped and unclasped her hands, wrung them, and moaned as if some one were killing her.

"Ipecacuanha wine!" I shouted. "Run Emily! Run over to the chemist's and get it fresh—it must be fresh—and don't lose an instant! Hot water, Phyllis, and a sponge! And tell them to get a bath ready!"

They scurried away, and Emily, hatless and panting, was back from the chemist's on the other side of the street before I had finished loosening the infant's clothes; and he nearly choked himself with the first spoonful of the stuff, which nevertheless I was obliged to make him swallow.

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"He can't! He can't!" Phyllis moaned, tears that she forgot to wipe away running down her poor face like rain down a window-pane. "Oh, he's choking! He's going into convulsions! He's dying! Oh, Ted, Ted! Oh, my precious angel! Oh, what shall I do!"

I calmly gave him another spoonful of the ipecacuanha wine, for I knew what I knew—that in ten minutes all this grief would subside with the sufferings of the poor child—and almost immediately the expected results occurred. It was an agitating moment for her, still imagining convulsions and the throes of dissolution, and an anxious one for me, because this was a much younger victim to croup than any I had had to deal with; but when the paroxysm passed it was evident to everybody—and the servants also were standing round—that his distress was already soothed and the tension of the attack relieved. I put him gently into the warm bath, heating it gradually till he might almost have been scalded without knowing it, fomenting the

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little throat with a soft sponge; and when I took him out and rolled him in a warm blanket, he sank at once to sleep in my arms, and the crisis and the danger were over.

Then in dashed Dr. Errington, desperately alarmed because he was so late, and full of suspicious questions. Phyllis took him aside and explained everything, and, although it was hard to convince him that the right thing had been done, eventually he was convinced, and owned it.

"I congratulate you, Mrs. Braye, on your presence of mind," he said handsomely. "It it not at all unlikely, from what Mrs. Juke tells me, that the prompt measures you took averted a serious attack."

"Thank you, doctor," I replied with a modest smile. "I am glad to prove to you that I am of some use in a sick-room."

He looked a little embarrassed—as well he might—and Emily flushed up. It was her habit to blush at anything and nothing, like a half-grown school girl. But Phyllis spoke out bravely.

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"Mother has just saved his life, Dr. Errington—that's all. If she had not come at the moment she did, he must have choked to death. None of us knew what to do to relieve him, but she knew at once." Then, as she kneeled beside me where I sat on the nursing chair by the fire, she dropped her poor, pretty, tired head upon my shoulder, and said, in the most natural way in the world: "Father is right—there's no nurse in the world like her."

I have had many happy moments in my life, first and last, but I do think that was one of the happiest.

We sat by the fire until dusk—we three and the sleeping child. He had gone off in my arms, and I would not permit him to be moved or touched. As long as the light lasted I watched his sweet face, and the blessed dew of perspiration on his still open lips and where the matted curls stuck to his nobly-shaped brow; never had I seen such a splendid boy of his age—except my own. I made Phyllis put up her feet on a lounge opposite, and every now and then I met her wistful eyes

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looking at me as if she were a child herself again. Yet I saw a great change in her—the great change that motherhood makes in every woman—enhancing her charm in every way. Emily sat on the stool between us. Once or twice she attempted to go—and I wished she would—but Phyllis would not let her. However, though not one of us yet, she would be soon, and in our murmured talk together I instructed them both in some of the things of which, in spite of a doctor being the husband of one of them, they were alike ignorant.

"Remember," I said, "never to be without a four-ounce bottle of ipecacuanha wine, hermetically sealed when fresh, and kept where you can readily lay your hand upon it. And when you find your child breathing in that loud, hoarse way, or beginning that barking cough, give a teaspoonful at once—at *once*—and another every five minutes until relieved. Now don't forget that, either of you. You thought it only a bad cold, Phyllis dear, but I could have told you differently if

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you had sent for me. When he gets another attack——"

"Oh, do you think he will have another?" she gasped, springing up on her sofa with that unnecessary, uncontrollable agitation which I understood so well.

I told her I expected it, but that there was no need to be alarmed, since she now knew how to recognise and deal with the complaint, which, even if constitutional with him, he would grow out of in a few years. I suggested causes to be guarded against—stomach troubles, the notorious insalubrity of Melbourne streets, and so on—and reassured her as much as I could.

"Pray Heaven," she sighed, with tears in her eyes, "that I may never see him like this again! Oh, I can't bear to think of it!" She shuddered visibly. "He would have been dead now—now, at this very moment—and Ted would have come home to find we were childless—if it had not been for you, mother."

"I think it very likely," I said, looking at the darling as I gently swayed him to and fro

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on the low rocking-chair. "But he won't die now."

"And he wasn't christened!" she ejaculated.

"*That* didn't matter," Emily put in, with her inevitable blush. "You don't believe in that old fetish of baptismal regeneration, surely, Phyllis? You don't think the poor little soul would have been plunged into fire and brimstone because a man did not make incantations over it?"

I rebuked Emily. As I had before remarked to Tom, she had all sorts of maggots in her head. It was the B. A., the advanced woman, coming out in her, and I did not like to see it, my own family having been brought up so differently. I observed with relief, that Phyllis took no notice of her flippant questions. She looked at me—knowing that I should understand—and said she felt as if it would be a comfort to her somehow to have him baptized. I suggested that it would be nice to have it done in the cathedral as soon as he was well enough; and just after that he

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awoke, we gave him his medicine, and Emily went home.

When I had dressed the child for his cot and made him comfortable I took up my own cloak and bonnet. But Phyllis looked so aghast at the proceeding, and implored me with such evident sincerity not to leave her, and particularly not to leave the baby, that I consented to stay at any rate until Edmund returned—although, as I represented to her, her father would be thinking I had been run over in the street.

When she heard her husband's step in the hall she made an excuse to run down to speak to him about the boy, and they came back together, and straightway embraced me with all their four arms at once. Edmund, who has always had the manners of a prince, spoke in the nicest way about my goodness to them.

"And now you won't leave us any more, Mater dear—now you see how badly we manage things without you to help us? I have sent a message to the captain—I've asked him to come by the next train—and your room is

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getting ready. You *will* stay—for our sakes —won't you?"

I wept on Edmund's shoulder, like a complete idiot. And of course I stayed.

. . . . . .

Shall I ever forget that springtime! The garden was a garden of Eden with flowers and birds—the bulbs in bloom, bushes of carmine japonica, great clouds of white almond and pink peach blossom overhead, and the scent of daphne and violets at every turn. As for the house, it was a little paradise on earth, which a house can never be, to my thinking, without a baby in it. To see that dear child crawling all over it, with Phyllis flying after him—to hear him chirping to his grandfather, who seemed to forget there were such things as pigs and fowls to see to—oh, it was too blissful for words! I easily persuaded Edmund that Collins Street was a place for women and children to live in when they must and get out of when they could, and he knew when he confided his treasures to me that they could not be in safer hands. He

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told me so, and I am happy to say the event justified his faith. Every time that he came over—which was almost daily, though often he had not half an hour to stay—he found them rosier and plumper, turning the scale at a trifle more.

As I kept them for the summer—in the middle of which we all went to Lorne for a month—they were with me at the time of Harry's marriage in the spring. Edmund came down that morning to fetch his wife and Lily to the wedding, bringing a carriage for them and Tom. Of course they wanted me to go—everybody wanted it—Tom almost flatly declined to stir a step without me; but I said, no, I would keep house and take care of the precious grandson. After the way I had been deprived of him in the past, it was beautiful to think of having him for a whole day to myself. And, as I said to Tom, it was all an old woman was fit for.

"Oh, I like that!" he laughed, throwing an arm round my waist. "You know very well you've only got to put your smart gown

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on and walk away from the lot of 'em—bride and bridesmaids and all."

Old goose! But I am sure when he was dressed, and the lilies of the valley stuck in his buttonhole, he could walk away from any young bridegroom in the matter of looks—aye, even his own handsome son. They all kissed me fondly before leaving the house—my pretty girls, and Edmund, who was as dear as they—and I stood at the gate to see them go with the pleasant knowledge that I should be more conspicuous by my absence than any one by their presence at the wedding party, except the bride herself.

In the afternoon, when Eddie was asleep and I was beginning to feel rather tired of my own company, I had a visit from kind old Mrs. Juke. She too had married her sons and daughters, so she could sympathise with me. We had a comfortable tea together, and lots of talk, comparing notes, as mothers love to do; and then we amused ourselves with our grandchild, like two infants with a doll. She was of Tom's opinion that he was the image of

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me, and she was in raptures at the improvement in him since I had "saved his life"—as she persisted in calling the mere giving of a simple emetic. Strange to say, with all the children she had had, she could not remember a case of croup amongst them, and she did not know the sovereign virtue of fresh ipecacuanha wine. Later in the afternoon we walked to the new house, wheeling the perambulator in turn; and I showed her everything, and she thought all perfect—as it was. She was wonderfully agile for a rather stout woman, making nothing of the long tramp; and her intelligent appreciation of artistic things surprised me. I had long discovered the fact that she was excellently educated. Her father had had large flour mills and been wealthy in his day, and his daughters had all had advantages—far more than I had had myself, in fact. Poor Mrs. Blount, on the contrary, had never mixed with cultured people, as her accent indicated.

"Well," said Ted's mother, in Ted's own nice way, when our inspection of the little

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house was ended, "Emily Blount ought to be a happy girl."

"And she is," I replied. "About as happy as a young bride ever was in this world—except myself."

"And me," said Mrs. Juke.

"And you."

I was glad and proud to believe that it was so.

But since then I have wondered sometimes whether Emily appreciates her extraordinary luck as she ought to do. Now and then it comes across me that she takes it a little too much as a matter of course.

It is very nice—very nice indeed—to have her living so near me, but I must say she is not quite so docile as she was before her marriage. Being a University woman, she naturally knows nothing in the world about housekeeping, and it was only in kindness to her and out of consideration for Harry's purse that I advised her now and then on domestic matters. I thought to be sure she would be grateful for hints from one of such large ex-

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perience, but it was evidently otherwise, since as a rule she did not take them. I told her that three pounds of butter a week for three people was preposterous, and that light crust made of clarified beef dripping was infinitely nicer as well as more wholesome than the rich puff paste they put to everything; but she went on taking the three pounds just the same. Though I gave her a sausage machine and endless recipes for doing up cold scraps, I used to see good pieces of meat thrown away continually; and a girl they had, who lit the morning fire with kerosene, and who told my Jane that she "couldn't stand the old lady at no price," broke crockery every time she touched it, and yet they persisted in keeping her. As I said to Harry, if they got into these extravagant ways when there were but two of them, how would it be presently when there was a family to support? But your son is never the same son after he has taken a wife, and Harry did not like to be appealed to. The other day he said, "Please don't interfere with her"—quite as if he were speaking

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to some meddlesome outsider. *I* interfere! The notion was too absurd. I reminded him how I had held aloof from the Jukes when they were young beginners, as proving as I was not the sort of person to force myself where I was not wanted, even upon my own children. But he and Emily are not like my beloved Edmund and Phyllis, who think there is no one in the world like "Mater dear."

THE END.

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